

Edited by

Martin J. Medhurst

Eisenhower's

War of Words

Rhetoric and Leadership



Michigan State University Press

Rhetoric and Public Affairs Series



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E*isenhower's War of Words: Rhetoric and Leadership* paints a revisionist portrait of Dwight Eisenhower as a strategic communicator who was highly involved in the series of crises that characterized his administrations. As a consummate cold warrior, Eisenhower understood that words, images, perceptions, and the shaping of attitudes was central to the ongoing battle with the Soviet Union. He used rhetoric—actions and messages intentionally designed to persuade—to achieve many of his goals. To Ike, rhetoric were the central weapon for waging—and winning—the Cold War. Understood as a strategic art of selection, arrangement, nuance, timing, and audience adaptation, rhetoric became, for Eisenhower, the preferred means of conflict resolution.

Examining both foreign and domestic crises, *Eisenhower's War of Words* reveals a chief executive who was always thinking, planning, and looking for the opportune moment to strike. Individual chapters are devoted to the crises concerning Vietnam, McCarthyism, the H-Bomb, massive retaliation, Open Skies, Suez, Sputnik, Little Rock, the U-2 Affair, and the military-industrial complex. Eisenhower's rhetorical leadership saw America through a decade that was anything but tranquil. This book examines one of the primary means by which he accomplished that goal.

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Edited by Martin J. Medhurst

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For

Julia Marie, James, and Monica

May you grow up in a world where

. . . peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

January 17, 1961

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Martin J.
Medhurst

Introduction

Dwight D. Eisenhower was a warrior. Behind the broad smile and twinkling blue eyes, behind the upraised arms and immense personal magnetism lurked a Cold War strategist of the first order. To understand anything about President Eisenhower, one must keep constantly in mind that he was first—and last—General Eisenhower. Neither with the end of World War II nor with his election to the presidency did Eisenhower ever cease to think and act like the military man he was trained to be. From the years immediately following his graduation from West Point in 1915, to his brilliant performance at the Command and General Staff School in 1925, to his historic rout of the Second Army during the Louisiana maneuvers of 1941, Eisenhower built his career as a strategist and tactician. That the majority of those years from 1915 to 1941 were spent in staff positions where he worked for such notables as Fox Connor, John J. Pershing, and Douglas MacArthur should not obscure the fact that Ike was trained as a warrior, not a paper pusher. When war came, Ike was ready to wage it and to employ any and all tools at his disposal, including psychological warfare, black propaganda, and deception.

Upon his election to the presidency in 1952, General Eisenhower purposed not only to continue the Cold War that he had inherited from the Truman administration; he decided to win it, even though he was under no illusions that victory would come quickly or easily. Eisenhower understood that the nature of that war was essentially rhetorical—that is, that it was a war of words, images, perceptions, attitudes, motives, and expectations. It was a war in which the battlefield was in the hearts and minds of people, both in America and throughout the world, especially in those areas ripe for communist exploitation because of poverty, internal turmoil, or political corruption. From his first inaugural address of January 1953 until his farewell address of January 1961, Eisenhower operated from the premise that “The future shall belong to the free.”¹ Far from merely announcing this sentiment, Ike set about to make it a reality. Foremost among Eisenhower’s weapons in this war was rhetorical discourse—“discourse intentionally designed to achieve a particular goal with one or more specific audience.”² This book is about such discourse.

For Eisenhower, rhetoric was a weapon with which to wage Cold War. Too often, scholars write about Cold War as though the crucial component is to be

found in the adjective. To Ike, the Cold War was not first and foremost “cold,” it was first and foremost “war,” though a kind of war requiring special means and striving toward a particular end—a “peace” that was neither peace nor war, but something in between. When Ike spoke of this war, he always took as his focus the end desired rather than the means used to pursue that end. He thus spoke of “the chance for peace,” “waging peace,” and “the price of peace,” even titling the second volume of his White House memoirs, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961*. That the Cold War was not ended nor true peace achieved during Eisenhower’s eight years in office has led some to label his administrations a failure. But careful study of Eisenhower’s speeches and writings makes clear one thing: Ike never believed that “victory” would come quickly, but he did believe it would come. He believed that it would come not with a bang, but with an internal collapse of the Soviet Union. The goal, therefore, was to outlast the opponent. The Cold War would not be a sprint, but a long-distance race in which the side that could keep itself in “balance”—a crucial concept for Eisenhower—would be most likely to win in the end.

The central role for rhetoric, therefore, was to promote balanced perceptions and actions at home, instigate imbalance and frustration in the enemy, and induce neutrals to view the Western allies as their best hope for political and economic advancement. To Eisenhower, effective rhetoric had almost nothing to do with style or delivery. The lilting tones of a Roosevelt or the balanced parallelisms of a Kennedy impressed Eisenhower not at all. Instead, rhetoric was thought of as a strategic art of selection, invention, arrangement, word choice, nuance, tone, implication, timing, and audience adaptation. Most centrally, rhetoric was purposive; it existed to accomplish goals in the real worlds of international diplomacy and domestic debate. It was a weapon in the arsenal of the Cold War, one that could be employed selectively, and as the situation required, to effect particular strategic ends.

This collection of essays is about Eisenhower’s strategic use of rhetoric. It is organized around significant moments in the Eisenhower presidency, moments when rhetorical discourse was brought into play in an effort to effect change or modification in the existing situation. Such moments were often ones of crisis—McCarthyism, Indochina, Suez, Little Rock, the U-2 affair. At such times the strategic use of rhetoric became the primary means by which Eisenhower sought to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of audiences, both foreign and domestic. Study of such moments allows one to learn more about Eisenhower as a strategic communicator as well as about the nature, possibilities, and limitations of rhetoric as a medium for the conduct of public business.

Chapter one opens with an overview of “Eisenhower as Cold Warrior.” Robert L. Ivie finds in Eisenhower “a powerful rhetorical agent of Cold War acculturation” who helped to “institutionalize an age of peril.” By providing an overview of Eisenhower’s speaking during his eight years in office, Ivie demonstrates how “Eisenhower portrayed the communist threat as pervasive, persistent, global, and total—a conflict that would continue indefinitely until either slavery or freedom

prevailed.” The author finds two conceptual metaphors that drive Eisenhower’s rhetorical vision and that function to instantiate a “cultural pathology of peril.”

Mark J. Schaefermeyer devotes chapter two to an analysis of “Dulles and Eisenhower on ‘Massive Retaliation.’” The author finds the doctrine of massive retaliation effective “as a *rhetorical strategy*” because it was “masterfully conceived in its indirection.” Neither Dulles nor Eisenhower alone can be credited with originating the concept of massive retaliation, according to Schaefermeyer, though both assisted in its formulation and both subscribed to its tenets. By embracing the concept, the president and his secretary of state “sought to make ambiguity their ally.”

In “‘Keeping the Faith’: Eisenhower Introduces the Hydrogen Age,” Rachel L. Holloway argues that when “faced with uncertainty and public anxiety” over the H-Bomb, President Eisenhower drew on a “long tradition of religious interpretations of American experience” both to neutralize potential opposition to the bomb and to create a “definitional orientation toward nuclear weapons” in general. In so doing, Eisenhower secured four rhetorical advantages but also, in Holloway’s judgment, raised significant questions about “the power of language to subvert public participation and democratic debate.”

Nowhere was the power of language to subvert democracy more pronounced than in “The Case of Eisenhower Versus McCarthyism.” In the fourth chapter, Thomas Rosteck explores both the content and form of Eisenhower’s public rhetoric about McCarthy, McCarthyism, and internal subversion. Rosteck argues that “Eisenhower created an inconsistent rhetorical world” because the president’s arguments showed “an acceptance of the *form*” of McCarthyism. Utilization of this argumentative form had certain rhetorical advantages, Rosteck argues, but in the end promulgated “the vision of a world starkly divided” and thus helped to “legitimate” the “paranoia of the McCarthy movement.”

In chapter five, “Eisenhower and the Indochina Problem,” Gregory A. Olson traces Dwight Eisenhower’s thinking on the problem of Vietnam using both public and private sources. He finds that Eisenhower “expressed belief in the domino theory” some “two years before assuming the presidency,” but that his thinking throughout his eight years in office was affected more by the situational demands of the moment than by adherence to any particular theory or a priori belief system. By taking rhetorical refuge in the “miracle” of Diem, the “Eisenhower administration trapped itself and future administrations,” says Olson, “into a commitment to prove the veracity of that rhetoric.”

J. Michael Hogan investigates “Eisenhower and Open Skies: A Case Study in ‘Psychological Warfare’” in chapter six. He argues that scholars have failed “to appreciate Eisenhower’s concern with ‘psychological strategy,’” and offers Eisenhower’s Open Skies proposal at the 1955 Geneva Conference as “a classic expression of that strategy.” Far from being a failure, Open Skies, according to Hogan, “did precisely what it was *designed* to do: it recaptured the propaganda offensive from the Soviet Union and cultivated favorable world opinion.”