
Presidential Manhood: Roosevelt, Hoover, and Gendered Language in the 1932 Election

Christopher Empett

The Great Depression reshaped the United States in ways that no other national emergency ever had. Farmers went bankrupt; men fled their families in shame because they could no longer be breadwinners and unemployment surged pushing down wages for those who could still find a job. It is worth examining how Franklin Roosevelt, an upper-class man of extreme privilege, was able to re-brand himself as a caring “man-of-the-people,” who understood the struggles of the average person. Herbert Hoover, on the other hand, a man who had grown up in poverty, was unable to escape perceptions that his loyalties were to the powers of wealth and capital.

Gender historians have not investigated the gender discourses of this election, or how Roosevelt and his supporters undermined Hoover’s claims in those areas. Exploring the ways the “self-made man” and “man-of-the-people” narratives were expressed and manipulated by these two candidates offers insights that can be applied to inquiries of other Presidential elections. This includes the 2020 presidential campaign where Bernie Sanders used language to align himself with the working class (“us”) while using third person pronouns to distance himself from the wealthy, while his critics questioned the affinity a millionaire with three houses could have for the working class.¹ President Trump

¹ Maeve Reston, “Democrats lay into each other on debate stage as candidates face crucial phase in primary fight,” *CNN*, February 20, 2020 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/19/politics/2020-primary-debate-las-vegas/index.html> (Accessed February 23, 2020). Mr. Sanders connected himself to the working class as he argued for policies to bring the working class together “around an agenda that works for us and not just the billionaire class”... Matt Viser, Annie Linskey, Chelsea Janes and Michael Scherer, “At fiery Democratic debate, a sour welcome for Bloomberg and criticism for Sanders,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2020 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/at-fiery-democratic-debate-a-sour-welcome-for-bloomberg-and-criticism-for-sanders/2020/02/20/3b94ac2a-532e-11ea-929a-64efa7482a77_story.html (Accessed February 23, 2020).

portrays himself as a “man-of-the-people” because, in the words of his supporters: “He tells it like it is. He is his own man.”² These gendered characteristics of manhood – being a “common man” (or man-of-the-people) and being one’s “own man” will be familiar to close observers of the 1932 election.

Historians have primarily looked at the election of 1932 as a contest between two ideological responses to the Great Depression. Herbert Hoover felt that the government should interject itself in the emergency as little as possible. He believed that the American system was robust enough to heal itself, so long as it was not damaged by ill-advised tinkering or radical reform. Franklin Roosevelt famously believed that it was time for a “New Deal” to restore equity because the playing board of American life had been tilted such that the American system was benefiting the elites at the expense of the “forgotten man.”³

My research looks at the election of 1932 and the competing narratives of the two presidential candidates. How did they portray themselves as men and how did they attack each other as less than manly? Investigating this question reveals the importance of gendered language in presidential debates then and now. Leadership skills and being a “man-of-the-people” were the two most prominent ideas of manhood as the candidates battled over the singular issue of the 1932 election: The Great Depression. Roosevelt argued that he was the one sensitive to the plight of the

² Jackson Katz, “Man Enough? Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and the Politics of Presidential Masculinity,” *Voice Male*, Volume 20, Issue 68 (Spring 2016), 14-16.

³ James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and The Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 144. MacGregor Burns sees the 1932 election as a fencing match where Roosevelt launched attacks against Hoover from the political left, right and center. He sympathized that with Hoover’s “orderly engineer’s mind he could not come to grips with this antagonist.” William E. Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009), 139. Leuchtenburg likened the election to a boxing match between an adept politician and a hopelessly out of touch incumbent desperately fighting to ward off defeat. Eliot A. Rosen, *Hoover, Roosevelt and the Brains Trust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Rosen views the 1932 election as a contest between a Roosevelt who embraced new ideas and surrounded himself with a brain trust of experts and old ideas that were defended stubbornly by the singular personality of Herbert Hoover.

“forgotten man” and used this as the foundation of his argument that he would lead the United States out of the Depression and offer Americans a “New Deal”. Hoover insisted that his humble origins kept him ever mindful of the common man and based his every decision on the needs of the humblest American. Yet Roosevelt, a member of the American aristocracy, won the election with 472 electoral votes and almost 60% of the popular vote. How was a man born to immense privilege able to use gendered language to make his case to American voters that he was one of them?

The two men who once regarded each other highly emerged from the election as embittered and enduring enemies.⁴ Hoover had ascended easily to the presidency in 1928 during a time of prosperity for which his party took credit.⁵ When the Depression struck just one year later, Hoover hunkered down, drawing on his years as a successful administrator to tackle the problems as he faced them. Unfortunately, this meant the public lost sight of him and thought he was burying his head in the sand. By 1932 the country was on its knees and people were losing faith in the American system. Hoover responded by deflecting blame for the Depression to external forces and destructive behaviors like stock market speculation that he himself had warned against. Hoover believed that in time the American system of individualism, private initiative, and charity would correct the course of state.⁶

Franklin Delano Roosevelt faced serious opposition in his quest to achieve the Democratic nomination, but possessed what British Ambassador to the United States Robert Lindsay described as “antennae and political sense to his very fingertips.”⁷ Ironically, Hoover preferred Roosevelt among the Democratic contenders

⁴ Dwight Miller and Timothy Walch, *Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Document History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 1.

⁵ Harris Gaylord Warren, *Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 47.

⁶ Wilton Eckley, *Herbert Hoover* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980).

⁷ Benjamin D Rhodes, “The Election of 1932, as Viewed from the British Embassy at Washington,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (1983), 453-457.

because he thought he was one of the more beatable options.⁸ While Hoover advised patience, perseverance and faith in the system, Roosevelt advocated direct, immediate and broad government intervention. Hoover's focus on the long-term sanctity of the American system over the immediate hardships facing Americans contributed to the public perception that he was insensitive to their plight. Meanwhile, Roosevelt Spoke to the "Forgotten Man" in warm and uplifting speeches. Hoover worked feverishly in the White House, unseen, as Roosevelt visited communities all over the United States by train and promised them action to relieve their suffering. Roosevelt accused Hoover of neglecting the forgotten man in favor of subsidizing business interests.⁹

Analyzing the gendered language used by Roosevelt reveals that he built his case that he was the best man to lead America through its crisis on his claim that he was a common man or a "man-of-the-people". He averred many qualities of manliness: good judgement, strength, duty, experience and patriotism – but all these assertions were grounded in, or grew from, this core claim that he was a "man-of-the-people".

On April 7, 1932, Roosevelt argued his view that properly executed plans are "built from bottom to top and not from top to bottom." Throughout the campaign he emphasized his belief that recovery from the Depression depended upon understanding and addressing the plight of the common man. He contended that the Depression called to put "faith ... in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid" where he saw the "unorganized but indispensable units of economic power." In drawing attention to the faith, he put in the "infantry of our economic army" Roosevelt portrayed himself as connected and engaged with them.¹⁰ If solutions were built from the bottom-up, and he was building solutions, then he was working from the bottom himself.

⁸ Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, 138. For more on this see Rosen, 303. Hoover worried the long-term consequences of government intervention and thought it would lead to tyranny.

⁹ David Hinshaw, *Herbert Hoover: American Quaker* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1950), 202.

¹⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Forgotten Man," (Radio Address, Albany New York, April 7, 1932) New Deal Network, <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932c.htm>.

One way Roosevelt bridged the gap between his affluent background and the people “at the bottom” was through language and word choice. In the Forgotten Man Speech, he expressed his conclusions and ideas in the first person (“In my calm judgement”) to show he had the wisdom to lead, but used unifying language (“Let us admit frankly”) to connect himself to the people.¹¹ Roosevelt constantly engaged in a conversational style that could have been found among peers sharing a kitchen table. His repeated use of inclusive pronouns like “we”, “our” and “us” painted a self-portrait of Roosevelt in partnership with the “forgotten man” - both in sharing the problems of the Depression and building solutions to them.¹²



Figure 1 - Roosevelt Jovially Plain Talking with Chaplain Crawford
(<https://picryl.com/media/franklin-d-roosevelt-talks-with-chaplain-crawford-w-brown-at-camp-joseph-t-ba26ae>, Public domain, accessed March 28, 2020)

Roosevelt also connected himself with voters as a “man-of-the-people” by carefully constructing shared experiences. Roosevelt never mentioned that he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy when discussing his service in World War One. In his “Forgotten Man” Speech, he reminded voters that “fifteen years ago my public duty called me to an active part in a great national emergency.”¹³ Speaking in Portland in September of 1932, he told the audience he was “Speaking in the language of the Navy, with which I was associated for many eventful years.”¹⁴ Later he said

¹¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Forgotten Man.”

¹² Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Campaign Address at Columbus Ohio,” (Speech, Columbus Ohio, August 20, 1932)

http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/msf/msf00502 (Accessed October 15, 2017). This is another speech with many examples.

¹³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Forgotten Man.”

¹⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Portland Speech: Public Utilities Hydro-Electric Power,” (Speech, Portland, Oregon, September 21, 1932, New Deal Network, <http://newdeal.feri.org/texts/60.htm>) Accessed October 2, 2016.

he “could only be thankful for my naval training.”¹⁵ He simultaneously connected himself to the common man through the idea of shared service, while keeping silent about his specific role in government, distancing himself from the elites.

Roosevelt never used condescending or pontificating language with voters. He began a speech on public utilities by saying: “I have come, not primarily to speak, but rather, to hear; not to teach, but to learn.” Two paragraphs later he told his audience what he proposed to do about the public utilities, but again used phrases like “It is scarcely necessary to tell you that” (indicating they were equals who would have reached the same conclusions) and addressed the audience as “my friends.”¹⁶ Roosevelt’s assertion that he understood the problems of the “little fellow” and shared their fears, interests and objectives was an incessant drumbeat throughout his campaign.

Political supporters helped shore up this “man-of-the-people” narrative. The *New York Times* contrasted Hoover and Roosevelt. Both were “as typical of America as the Hudson River” and Roosevelt “was financially independent” – words that downplayed his wealth. The same article also tried to cast FDR as a self-made man. Comparing his background and career with that of Hoover, the *Times* styled Roosevelt as: “... the rarer and no less romantic fable of the rich boy, born and bred in the aristocratic tradition, who *chooses (italics mine)* to work his way up in the leveling and chancy profession of politics.”¹⁷ The *Times* made it sound like the rich boy abandoned his advantages to strike out on his own to build a life for himself from the ground up with no comfortable nest to return to. His future was as “chancy” as the forgotten men who might not know where the next meal might come from. Roosevelt was a man-of-the-people, and he had built a world for himself from the ground up – albeit a world within the political arena.

¹⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Roosevelt’s Nomination Address,” (Speech, Chicago, Illinois) New Deal Network, <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932b.htm>. Accessed October 2, 2016.

¹⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Portland Speech.”

¹⁷ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The Two Men at the Big Moment,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1932.

In his “Forgotten Man” radio address, he transitioned from the foundational discussion of being a “man-of-the-people” who made plans from the bottom-up into self-portrayals of his calm, intelligent leadership. Roosevelt warned that in “my calm judgment, the Nation faces today a more grave emergency than in 1917.” In his judgment, the ideas of the Republican Party were just a “stopgap”.¹⁸ Roosevelt warned that it was wrong to give money to the banks, large corporations and other elites with the expectation of those benefits trickling down. In expressing his “good judgement”, he argued for restoring buying power to the farmers, protecting homeowners against foreclosure, protecting the interests of the “little guy” and that empowering them which would lead to a national recovery. (A bottom-up recovery, in contrast with Hoover’s top-down one).

In a September 1932 speech on public utility policy he described the actions he took against the New York Public Service Commission when he was New York governor. Even though he was discussing a different attribute of manhood, “experience”, it was contextualized within his core narrative that he was a “man-of-the-people”. He asserted that the utility had an obligation to provide people with reliable service at reasonable rates, emphasizing the rights of the individual energy consumer. He described his experience forcing the utilities to live up to these responsibilities and claimed he had “created horror and havoc among the [Samuel] Insulls and other magnates of that type.”¹⁹ He reminded people that he fought the magnates to protect the interests of the common man. He tightly wound the experience that qualified him to occupy the White House within his proclaimed sensibilities as a “man-of-the-people.”

Roosevelt even used his battle with polio to reinforce his “man-of-the-people” image and demonstrate his shared experience with the struggles of the average American. Although Roosevelt did not discuss his physicality in his speeches during the Presidential campaign, it was part of his narrative. During his 1928 gubernatorial run he opted not to hide his disability, but to leverage it as a symbol of his strength and resilience. In 1931 Eleanor Roosevelt told *Liberty Magazine*: “If the paralysis

¹⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Forgotten Man.”

¹⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Portland Speech.”

couldn't kill him, the presidency won't." Roosevelt's people encouraged the magazine to test his strength and endurance vigorously. The author concluded that Roosevelt could "take more punishment than many men ten years younger. Merely his legs were not much good to him."²⁰ Roosevelt portrayed himself as a physically strong man who took a fall and got back up, a narrative the common man could relate to.

When Roosevelt argued he was morally strong he framed that strength as being in service to the people. Discussing his battle with the New York utilities, Roosevelt said he had "...been attacked by the propaganda of certain utility companies as a dangerous man. I have been attacked for pointing out the same plain economic facts that I state here tonight." He portrayed himself as relentlessly committed to truth, whatever the charges against him. As a "man-of-the-people," he promised audiences that he would always "seek to protect the welfare of the people against selfish greed. If that be treason, my friends, then make the most of it!"²¹

Roosevelt argued that good plans were built from the bottom up and criticized Hoover from the top down. He charged that Hoover was emblematic of the "few who thrived unduly at the expense of all" and hardly capable of understanding the needs of the common man.²² Roosevelt complained that the relationship of the farmer with the "...great banks of Chicago and New York is known to be pretty remote. The two billion dollar fund which President Hoover and the Congress have put at the disposal of the big banks, the railroads and the corporations of the Nation is not for him." Roosevelt bemoaned the "forgotten man" was "beyond the concern of a national administration which can think in terms only of the top of social and economic structure." Hoover was not, in Roosevelt's reading, a "man-of-the-people" in touch with the

²⁰ Christopher Clausen, "FDR's Hidden Handicap," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 2005 <http://archive.wilsonquarterly.com/essays/fdrs-hidden-handicap>. Accessed October 15, 2016.

²¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Portland Speech."

²² Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address," (Speech, Commonwealth Club, San Francisco California, September 23, 1932) <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/index.php?p=collections/findingaid&id=582> Accessed October 15, 2016.

public good but instead pandered to the owners of capital. He chided the Hoover administration “has either forgotten or it does not want to remember the infantry of our economic army” by worrying more about the elites than the common people.²³

In his nomination address, Roosevelt accused Hoover of being an aristocratic elitist who saw government as a form of monarchy where government cared only for the wealthy, a form of government he thought had “...left this country in 1776.”²⁴ Hoover came from a modest background and through work and good fortune become the epitome of the “self-made man,” and should have been able to make an argument that he knew more about the real world than his wealthy opponent. But Roosevelt made a very strong case that the opposite was true.

Roosevelt argued that Hoover’s support for tariffs demonstrated poor judgement because it did more harm than good and was “foolish” because it did not protect farmers or jobs. He linked the President’s bad judgment to the idea that Hoover was not a “man-of-the-people” by arguing tariffs made goods more expensive and allowed the US elites to boost their profits. Thus, the common consumer was forced to pay higher prices in the interest of protecting companies from foreign competition.

Roosevelt shook his head at Hoover’s response to problems with U.S. over-production in the manufacturing sector. Hoover championed boosting exports to resolve the problem of over-production, but since most potential markets lacked money to buy American goods, U.S. banks loaned money to foreign customers. When these countries could not repay their debts, America’s woes deepened. Adding the tariffs to these conditions only exacerbated the decline of the economy. With American factories over producing, unpaid loans to overseas consumers and a tariff wall stifling trade, Roosevelt said that Hoover had led America into a situation where it “suddenly found the brakes locked on a slippery road.”²⁵ Roosevelt maintained that Hoover should have

²³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Forgotten Man.”

²⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Roosevelt’s Acceptance Speech for Presidential Nomination,” (Speech, Democratic Convention, Chicago, IL July 2, 1932) http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/msf/msf00494 Accessed October 12, 2016.

²⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Campaign Address at Columbus Ohio.”

anticipated this. According to Roosevelt, the Depression was not just a storm that could not be avoided; it was a storm that Herbert Hoover had blundered into because he was invoking tariff policies to help the wealthy owners of U.S. manufacturers with whom his sympathies lay.

Roosevelt accused the Hoover administration of lying, an unmanly action. "We will break foolish traditions and leave it to the Republican leadership, far more skilled in that art, to break promises."²⁶ Roosevelt angrily denounced Hoover for saying on October 25, 1929 - the day of the crash - "The fundamental business of the country, that is, production and distribution of commodities, is on a sound and prosperous basis. There is no reason business could not be carried on as usual". Roosevelt portrayed this as a lie since the statistical data showed unemployment was rising before the crash, and that the crash came months after the American Federation of Labor reported a "rapid decrease in the number of jobs." Roosevelt castigated Hoover for repeatedly claiming the worst was over only to have the Depression deepen. Roosevelt jeered: "That was the measure of Republican leadership."²⁷

Roosevelt charged that when Hoover could no longer claim "the worst was over," he lied by shifting blame for the Depression. "Finally, when facts could no longer be ignored and excuses had to be found, Washington discovered that the depression came from abroad." Roosevelt slammed Hoover for claiming the Depression was a contagion that came from abroad in his nomination acceptance speech before going on to set the record straight with his assertion that "the bubble burst first in the land of its origin - the United States. The major collapse in other countries followed. It was not simultaneous with ours."²⁸

Roosevelt argued Hoover was out of touch with the concerns of the "forgotten man" and engaged in cronyism that favored the privileged few over the multitude. Not being a "man-of-the-people" compromised Hoover's judgement and led to his dishonesty with the people. Without that foundation, Hoover's

²⁶ Roosevelt, "Roosevelt's Nomination Address."

²⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Campaign Address at Columbus Ohio."

²⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Campaign Address at Columbus Ohio."

other qualities of leadership were a house of cards that collapsed in a tumble of bad decisions.

Hoover tried to show that as a man of humble origins, he was as much a “man-of-the-people” as Franklin Roosevelt, and that he was equally compassionate about the plight of the average American. However, Hoover did not portray this sensitivity to the troubles of the American people as his most important quality of manhood. Instead, he focused on claims that he was a man of good judgment who had led the country well despite the turbulent times. Ultimately, his insistence that people should trust his leadership despite the fact he had to keep the battles he fought “secret” may have tainted his efforts to counter Roosevelt’s accusations that he was more in tune with the elites than the masses. Where Roosevelt said: “you and I both know” Hoover said: “Trust me, I know more about this than you possibly could.”

Hoover initially resisted active campaigning for the presidency, allowing Roosevelt to set the tone of gendered language. In September, when Hoover finally launched himself whole-heartedly into the campaign, he was motivated as much by a desire to defend his integrity and reputation as he was in winning the election.²⁹ Whereas Roosevelt promised to fight for the interests of the “little fellow” through reform, Hoover undertook to help the “little fellow” by resisting it.³⁰ Hoover stressed that “... our first duty is to preserve unfettered that dominant American spirit which has produced our enterprise and individual character.”³¹

He responded hotly to charges that he was a crony who did not understand the needs of the people and asserted that his leadership had already put the United States on course for better times. He had the calm, reasoned judgement (he claimed) to avoid ill-conceived decisions that could lead to America spiraling out of

²⁹ Leuchtenberg, *Herbert Hoover*.

³⁰ Herbert Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa” (Speech, Coliseum, Des Moines, Iowa, October 4, 1932) <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-coliseum-des-moines-iowa> Accessed September 30, 2016.

³¹ Herbert C. Hoover, “Presidential Nomination Address” (Speech, Republican Convention, Chicago, IL, August 11, 1932) <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-accepting-the-republican-presidential-nomination> Accessed September 30, 2016.

control, and had the courage and strength to stand up to those who might try to pressure him into making bad decisions that might seem appealing in time of panic but could have catastrophic long term effects.

Although he was subjected to harsh critiques from the moment the stock market crashed in 1929, Hoover determined it was best not to respond to these attacks and instead focused on working to get the country on track. For Hoover, this did not mean providing dole money or direct relief to Roosevelt's "Forgotten Men" because such assistance could weaken the independence of the individuals and create a burdensome bureaucracy. He devoted significant resources to banks, railroads and corporations, reasoning that helping large enterprises recover would create jobs and lead to broader economic health for people at every level.³² Hoover's initial decision not to engage in a rhetorical debate, coupled with his commitment to aide big enterprises rather than offer direct support to individuals meant that when he did start making the case that he had the appropriate manhood qualities for the job he had to start from the bottom-up himself. First, he had to connect with skeptical voters as a man-of-the-people.

Hoover tried to demonstrate that he was a man-of-the-people by reminding voters of his humble roots and his own childhood experiences with poverty. His effort failed because his memories of the past sounded almost nostalgic and failed to acknowledge the anxieties and hunger of voters in 1932. Hoover told Iowa voters: "I am glad, as a son of the soil of this State, to come back to where I was born and where I spent the first ten years of my boyhood. My parents and my grandparents came to Iowa in the covered wagon ... They worshiped God; they did their duty to their neighbors. They toiled to bring to their children greater comfort, better education, and to open to them a wider opportunity than had been theirs."³³ He tried to channel his family's values (worship, toil, duty to neighbors) and commitment to making better lives for

³² Martin Carcasson, "Herbert Hoover and the presidential campaign of 1932: The Failure of Apologia," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Spring, 1998), 349.

³³ Herbert Hoover, "Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa," October 4, 1932. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T Woolley. The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid+23269>.

their children into a legitimate claim as a “man-of-the-people”. Hoover insisted Roosevelt’s contentions that he was more interested in the welfare of elites like Samuel Insull were not true, and that he knew the pain of deprivation: “.... I was born in the midst of the terrible times of the seventies with their poverty and their difficulties... I do vividly recollect a Christmas that when the soul resources of joy were popcorn balls, sorghum and hickory nuts, when for a flock of disappointed children, there were no store toys, no store clothes.”³⁴ However in trying to express his connection to the common man through his memories of sixty years prior, Hoover was actually painting an image of how far from them he had travelled.

Hoover constantly reiterated his concern for common people, and that he had the sound judgment to keep their interests in mind as he protected them from radical or misguided ideas. This occasionally led to Hoover’s concealment of executive decisions he believed might result in panic from the American public. He assured voters that he had “...but one vision: the vision of the millions of homes of the type which I knew as a boy in this state.”³⁵ More important to Hoover than being a man-of-the-people was caring about them and protecting them – sometimes even protecting the “forgotten man” from tempting yet dangerous ideological balms.



Figure 2 Unlike FDR, Herbert Hoover was seldom photographed in a casual setting (Herbert A. French, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016822915/> accessed March 29, 2020, Public Domain)

Hoover presented his years as president during the difficult early years of the Depression as proof of his leadership skills. Accepting the nomination of his party on August 11, 1932, Hoover acknowledged that the Great Crash was fueled by

³⁴ Herbert Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa.”

³⁵ Herbert Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa.”

American “overproduction and speculative mania,” but he tried to shift the blame by claiming, “we marched with the rest of the world” in a fervor of optimism.³⁶ When the crash came, Hoover argued that he responded with wise and sensible policies to ride out the storm. Hoover told the Republican National Convention that “Gradually the country began to right itself. Eighteen months ago, there was a solid basis for hope that recovery was in sight.”³⁷

Hoover spoke of his leadership in terms of calm, steady decisions to steer the ship through the storm. Hoover said he “met the situation with proposals to private business and the Congress of the most gigantic program of economic defense and counterattack ever evolved in the history of the Republic.” His language and word choice was more complex and convoluted than Roosevelt’s as he assured his listeners that his measures “repelled the attacks of fear and panic.” He also asserted that he had stood up strongly against radical and dangerous “panaceas and shortcuts” that could have done more harm than good.³⁸

Hoover doggedly insisted that his administration made many efforts to protect Americans during the period of economic adversity. “We have battled to provide ... to merchants and farmers and industries. We have fought to retard falling prices... We have defended millions from the tragic result of droughts. We have mobilized ... to make work for the unemployed.”³⁹ Where Roosevelt spoke of being mobilized along with the average citizen, Hoover spoke as a general mobilizing his forces. His language described plans made from the top down.

In his pamphlet *American Individualism*, Hoover wrote that excessive government oversight and intervention could stifle innovation and economic health and open the door to radicalism and socialism, which he believed would be the downfall of the U.S. economy because it would bring American progress staggering to

³⁶ Herbert C. Hoover, “Presidential Nomination Address,” (Speech, Chicago, Illinois, August 11, 1932) Pepperdine School of Public Policy <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/academics/research/faculty-research/new-deal/hover-speeches/hh081132.htm>.

³⁷ Hoover, “Presidential Nomination Address.”

³⁸ Hoover, “Presidential Nomination Address.”

³⁹ Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa.”

a halt.⁴⁰ He worried that offering direct benefits to the unemployed would expand bureaucracy and destroy the intuitive and self-reliance of the recipients, creating a class of people permanently dependent on government aid.⁴¹

Hoover avowed bailouts given to large banks or insurance companies were intended to protect the little guys, not favor the wealthy. "We have struggled to save homes and farms from foreclosure of mortgages, battled to save millions of depositors and borrowers from the ruin caused by the failure of the banks, fought to assure the safety of millions of policy holders from failure of their insurance companies."⁴² Speaking of the controversial tariff policy, Hoover insisted he was acting in the farmer's best interests: "With the collapse in world prices and depreciated currencies the farmer was never so dependent upon his tariff protection for recovery as he is at the present time."⁴³

Hoover portrayed himself as a tireless protector whose leadership was preventing the U.S. from slipping into a worse predicament. "...It has been my daily task to analyze and to know the forces which brought these calamities. I have to look them in the face.... These battles have been waged and have succeeded in preventing you from infinitely greater harm that might have come to you...." Like Roosevelt, he claimed he had the moral strength to resist powerful interests. Facing pressure to abandon the gold standard and expand the money supply, he stated that "... we would stand up like men and render the credit of the United States government impregnable through the drastic reduction of Government expenditures and increased revenues until we balanced that budget."⁴⁴

If the public felt they hadn't seen the Hoover administration doing very much to correct the problems of the USA, Hoover defended his lack of visibility stating "many of these battles have had to be fought in silence... because the very disclosure of the forces opposed to us would have undermined the courage of the

⁴⁰ Leuchtenberg, *Herbert Hoover*.

⁴¹ Carcasson "The Failure of Apologia."

⁴² Hoover, "Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa."

⁴³ Hoover, "Presidential Nomination Address."

⁴⁴ Hoover, "Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa."

weak and induced panic in the timid...”⁴⁵ While Hoover portrayed himself as a strong leader who didn’t need public adulation to do the right thing, he simultaneously displayed himself as someone with poor regard for the “little man’s” judgement and fortitude.

Examining the two men’s language style is also very informative. When Roosevelt used the pronoun “we” while addressing the nation, he grouped himself together with all the Forgotten Men in America. In comparison, when Hoover used the word “we” he was describing his administration. “We have struggled to save... you from infinitely greater harm.” Roosevelt started his speeches by talking frankly to the public and moving forward to describe a solution they would achieve together – Hoover patiently explained that the people could not cope with the harsh realities from which he protected them. According to Hoover’s press secretary, Hoover the engineer wrote like an engineer and crafted long speeches with a many of technical details. Shy and reserved, he delivered his speeches in a rapid cadence while making little eye contact. According to Carcasson, Hoover believed the public wanted “information, not inspiration.”⁴⁶ If the election results can be trusted as a metric on this judgment, this analysis was wrong, and he was completely out of touch with the people. This misjudgment had proven Roosevelt’s point that he was not a man-of-the-people.

Roosevelt and Hoover both promised to protect the American people, but Roosevelt promised to protect them from magnates and greedy elites. Hoover pledged to protect them from economic devastation by shoring up the very enterprises Roosevelt had critiqued, and even vowed to protect the “common man” from themselves since they would not be able to understand the issues he was dealing with, and might pale in fright if exposed to the full truth of the issues at stake. Yet Hoover insisted they should trust him to navigate the country out of crisis because his calm, deliberate leadership ensured things didn’t get even worse. “The policies I have inaugurated have protected and aided its navigation

⁴⁵Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa.”

⁴⁶ Carcasson, “The Failure of Apologia.”

in this storm.”⁴⁷ Hoover’s approach to “protecting” people reinforced Roosevelt’s claims that Hoover was more aligned with elites than the common man and if Roosevelt argued that he cared about “the forgotten man,” Hoover’s rebuttal was to insist “he cared, too.”

Herbert Hoover contended Roosevelt was not a man-of-the-people at all but was instead a political opportunist with no ideas of his own. Unlike Hoover’s administration that “stood up like men” he lobbed charges that Roosevelt had the feminine characteristic of changing his mind unpredictably if he felt the need and would change his principles or say whatever he needed to say if it meant winning favor. Therefore, a man with such broken manhood traits as Roosevelt was not qualified to lead.

The *Los Angeles Times* shared Hoover’s concern that Roosevelt supported prohibition in states where it was popular while castigating it in states where it was not, all in an effort to secure votes. “The most serious defect of Franklin D Roosevelt either as office holder or office seeker is his incurable opportunism. Like a chameleon he adapts his colors to his environment... Today Roosevelt is the wettest of the wet (on prohibition), though reserving the sentiments on the subject for strongly anti-prohibition centers such as New York, New Jersey and San Francisco. In dry Kansas and relatively dry Southern California he did not mention repeal...”⁴⁸

Hoover also refuted Roosevelt’s charge that the tariffs served the elites and accused Roosevelt of misrepresenting them. Hoover maintained that tariffs protected small farms from being under sold by cheaper foreign produce and would likewise protect American manufacturing jobs. In gendered language Hoover was calling Roosevelt out for being a dishonest man, and for misleading people in pursuit of his own selfish objectives. Roosevelt was saying whatever it would take to get into the White

⁴⁷ Hoover, “Presidential Nomination Address”, “Jahncke Cites Hearst Menace: Publisher’s Rule Feared if Roosevelt Triumphs Solid Program of Hoover Offered as Alternative Warning Given on Radical Leaning of Democrat,” *The LA Times* summed up Hoover’s efforts approvingly. “The Republican Party has made a program and it is in operation. It is the boldest program of relief and reconstruction that any nation has ever adapted” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1932, 2.

⁴⁸ “Roosevelt the Opportunist,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1932, 1.

House, which in gendered language meant he was putting his hunger for personal gain ahead of duty and patriotism (what was right for the country) because a virtuous man would put the needs of his constituents ahead of his own. He also accused Roosevelt of not caring about the farmers and other “forgotten men” at all: “Now, has the Democratic Party ever proposed or supported a protective tariff on farm products? Has it ever given one single evidence of protection of this home market to the American farmer from the products raised by peasant labor on cheap land abroad?”⁴⁹

Hoover questioned whether Roosevelt was man enough to make any decisions on his own. He contended that because Roosevelt was a dishonest man who would misrepresent himself and his concern for the “forgotten man,” he would reach out for aid and support of anyone willing to help in his quest for power. What might they ask in return? And, since he had no ideas of his own, what policies might they suggest to him? While Hoover made the tough decisions as a strong leader, Roosevelt would make decisions based on the wishes of the people he owed political debts to.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Jahncke, a Hoover surrogate, questioned the people Roosevelt “gathered around himself”. He



Figure 3 Hoover Throwing First Pitch - Compare to FDR Below
(Herbert A. French,

<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/president-herbert-hoover-and-baseball-photo-1> Accessed March 29, 2020, Library of Congress)



Figure 4 FDR Looks at home as a Man Among the People
(Herbert A. French,

<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/president-herbert-hoover-and-baseball-photo-1> Accessed March 29, 2020, Library of Congress)

⁴⁹ Hoover, “Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa,” October 4, 1932. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T Woolley. The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=23269>.

claimed these people represented radical and un-American ideologies like socialism, and that Roosevelt had made secret bargains with them. Jahncke also asserted that Roosevelt only won the Democratic nomination because of the intervention of William Randolph Hearst. What had Roosevelt traded away for Hearst's support in order to fulfill his personal ambition? Jahncke wondered.⁵⁰ According to this argument, Roosevelt, not Hoover was beholden to the elite upper class.⁵¹

Hoover focused increasingly on Roosevelt's dishonesty (as he portrayed it) in the closing weeks of the campaign. Hoover accused Roosevelt of engaging in "feminine" gossip by spreading outright lies and calumnies to distort and obscure the accomplishments of his administration. He accused Roosevelt of lying when he called the Hawley-Smoot tariff the "highest tariffs in the history of the world"⁵² and again when Roosevelt accused Hoover of doing nothing during the first two years of the Depression: "It seems almost incredible that a man, a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, would broadcast such a violation of the truth." Hoover expressed even greater offense that Roosevelt put his personal ambitions above integrity by failing to answer Hoover's calls for assistance when he was Governor: "If the Governor will look up his own files of his official correspondence, he will find that within a month after the crash I appealed to him...for co-operation in creating employment and stabilizing wages..."⁵³

In the presidential election of 1932, while the manhood characteristics of leadership and honesty were the major points of debate, they were framed foundationally by the masculine value of being "men-of-the-people." Franklin Roosevelt successfully claimed this virtue for himself. Herbert Hoover did not. Hoover isolated himself by refusing to "level" with the people as Roosevelt did, and instead patronized them as incapable of

⁵⁰ "Jahncke Cites Hearst Menace: Publisher's Rule Feared if Roosevelt Triumphs" *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1932, 2.

⁵¹ "Jahncke Cites Hearst Menace," 2.

⁵² Hoover, "Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa."

⁵³ Hoover, "Indianapolis Campaign Speech," (Speech, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 28, 1932) Miller Center, University of Virginia <http://millercenter.org/president/hover/speeches/campaign-speech-in-indianapolis-indiana>.

understanding the decisions he was taking on their behalf. Hoover had failed to connect his memories of childhood poverty to the daily struggles people experienced in 1932. Instead, he made himself seem more remote by highlighting how far he had come. Hoover's belief that the American people wanted analysis instead of inspiration was a drastic misreading of the mood throughout the nation. Roosevelt claimed that he was a man-of-the-people while charging that Hoover was an aristocratic man, out of touch with the needs and challenges of the common man, and reminiscent of the monarchic power America had sought independence from. Despite his extreme privilege, Roosevelt succeeded in connecting to the "forgotten man" as a sympathetic compatriot sharing the journey. Roosevelt spoke in a friendly, intimate manner using language calculated to link him directly with the public. Comparing their speeches, it seems reasonable to conclude that Hoover's verbose style and his expectation that the public should trust him despite his belief they were too fragile to deal with the truth played into Roosevelt's narrative that Hoover was more of a ruler, than a leader. By framing himself solidly in the mantle of "man-of-the-people", Franklin Roosevelt successfully marketed himself as having the right qualities of manhood to lead the nation.