Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth

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WE KNOW MORE ABOUT DWIGHT DAVID EISENHOWER than ever before. The papers of his presidency, now open to scholars, constitute a documentary record of extraordinary richness. Scarcely a month goes by, moreover, without the appearance of yet another new book or article on his life and times. But, although we know much more about him, we do not necessarily also understand what he was about or what the significance of his presidency was. Too much of the literature seems limited by the debates of the past: Was Eisenhower an active or passive president? Was he a skillful politician or a bumbler? Was he dominant or subordinate in his relations with such powerful figures as John Foster Dulles? The answers to these questions have resulted in a useful but nevertheless limited sort of enlightenment.1 It is possible to proceed somewhat beyond these limits, however, by focusing on what might be loosely called the political economy of the Eisenhower years: on Eisenhower's thinking about the relationship of government and the economy, on

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1 A note on the historiography of the Eisenhower era. Most early interpretations of Eisenhower are dismissive. He had ended the Korean War and made the Republican party safe for internationalism and the New Deal, but he had provided little leadership in meeting the difficult new challenges of the mid-century, had reigned rather than ruled, was a somewhat naive and apolitical figure who, as Walter Lippmann put it, was never willing “to break the eggs that are needed for the omelette.” Especially see Clinton Rossiter, The American Presidency (2d edn., New York, 1960). Historians seemed to agree. In a poll of seventy-five historians by Arthur M. Schlesinger in 1962, they rated Eisenhower twenty-second among American presidents, between Andrew Johnson and Chester A. Arthur; Schlesinger, “Our Presidents: A Rating by 75 Historians,” New York Times Magazine, July 29, 1962, pp. 12, 40–41. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, against a backdrop of war and civil disorder, did historians and other intellectuals begin to revise this conventional portrait. See, for example, articles by Murray Kempton, Gary Wills, and Richard Rhodes, Arthur Larson's memoir, The President Nobody Knew (New York, 1968), and full-length studies by Herbert S. Parmet, Peter Lyon, and Charles C. Alexander. These works, despite important differences among them, portray Eisenhower as a far more complex, intelligent, and skillful chief executive. The opening in recent years of important new archival collections at the Eisenhower Library has resulted in an outpouring of books and articles extending and qualifying this reinterpretation. Especially see the work of Stephen E. Ambrose, Blanch Wiseman Cook, Robert A. Divine, Fred I. Greenstein, Richard H. Immerman, Burton I. Kaufman, Douglasinnard, Gary W. Reichard, and Elmo Richardson. The scholarship of these historians has been collectively labeled "Eisenhower revisionism," an unfortunately imprecise term that invites confusion with Cold War revisionism and obscures often profound differences among those so categorized.

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the connections between this thought and the powerful constituencies that rallied to his support, and on the ways in which this thought shaped the politics and policies of his administration.

Eisenhower was not, of course, a profound or original thinker. He did, however, take ideas seriously, especially in the area of political economy; and, although he typically expressed these ideas in platitudes, he did create, beyond the banality of his language, a fairly coherent vision of how society ought to operate. For Eisenhower, this body of thought, which I have labeled "the corporate common-wealth," represented an attempt to resolve what he saw as the contradictions of modern capitalism and to create a harmonious corporate society without class conflict, unbridled acquisitiveness, and contentious party politics. This thought, this vision, this effort provides a unifying theme for his presidency and supplies us with at least one way in which to understand his significance.

Eisenhower was a product of the organizational revolution that had transformed American life in the twentieth century, a member of the new managerial class that led the nation's great public and private bureaucracies. Although he was not an intellectual, his thought nevertheless reflects the history, interests, and dilemmas of this new class. At West Point, he was at best an indifferent student, graduating well down in his class. His early years of military service seem to have been more crowded with coaching football and card playing than with any intellectual endeavor. His tour of duty in Panama under General Fox Connor, which he later described as "a sort of graduate school in military affairs and the humanities," was doubtless influential in his intellectual development, as was his subsequent attendance at the army's Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth and the War College in Washington. So, too, was his political education, which began in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when he was attached to the office of the assistant secretary of war and charged with drafting plans for industrial mobilization in time of war, and which continued through nearly a decade of sometimes stormy service with General Douglas A. MacArthur. It was from the military itself, however, that Eisenhower absorbed the principal elements of his education; a respect for the efficiencies of organization, a contempt for politics and politicians, a distrust of popular democracy and of the masses whose "class fears and prejudices are easily aroused," and, finally, a strong commitment to duty and to the ideal of disinterested public service.2

These patterns of thought, widely shared among professional military men during the interwar years, were reinforced and deepened by the experience of command during the Second World War and by his service as army chief of staff immediately thereafter. He was especially alarmed by the strikes, inflation, and bitter partisan politics that characterized the postwar years. Nevertheless, as a

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1 These historians nevertheless share a willingness to treat Eisenhower seriously and to see in the Eisenhower presidency an important subject for historical investigation. This essay becomes possible, at least in part, as a result of their efforts.

professional soldier, he refrained from political utterances. He did not register a party affiliation nor did he vote in presidential elections. He later confessed that, if he had voted, he would have voted Republican in 1932, 1936, and 1940 but Democratic in 1944, because of the war. Not until 1948, when he left the army to assume the presidency of Columbia University, did he begin to express his views in letters and speeches. Although he still had neither the time nor the inclination for wide reading or systematic reflection, the pattern of thought that emerged during these years nevertheless suggests a fairly coherent social philosophy.

At the heart of Eisenhower's thinking was a struggle to reconcile and resolve the most fundamental conflicts of modern society. Industrialization, mass production and distribution, and the growth of urban populations had, he believed, all combined to create a complex, interdependent social system—a system that possessed the potential for the production of great wealth and material abundance but that was also precariously vulnerable to destruction through the selfish antagonisms of class conflict. In the nineteenth century, as he traced America's recent past, the power of "concentrated wealth" had become "a menace to the self-respect, opportunities, and livelihood of great groups of ordinary citizens" and had "compelled drastic action for the preservation of the laborer's dignity—for the welfare of himself and his family." Although the legislative reforms of the Progressive and New Deal eras had, in his view, largely ameliorated such dangers, the threat of class conflict remained. The single most important source of "all our problems," he wrote a prominent business leader in early 1952, was the disunity born of "the great chasms separating economic groupings." Not only did capital, labor, agriculture, and other interests contend among themselves, but each also sought to bend public policy to its own selfish ends: "such divisions, even though economic in origin, inevitably become so clearly reflected in political organization and doctrine that they damage both our political and economic structures, thus enlarging and perpetuating initial effects." In his diary, he posed the question in terms of Lenin's analysis of the contradictions within capitalism and of the conflict between capital and labor, between antagonistic capitalistic states, and between

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3 Interview with Merriman Smith, November 23, 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans. [hereafter, DDEL]. Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President of the United States (Ann Whitman File) [hereafter, EPP]. DDE Diaries series, box 5. The Ann Whitman File, a file maintained by Eisenhower's private secretary, contains some 265,000 documents that received the president's closest attention. It includes diary entries by the president and occasionally by Ann Whitman, correspondence between Eisenhower and members of his administration, close friends, and advisers, minutes of his meetings with the cabinet, legislative leaders, and national security advisers, notes and memoranda on other meetings in the Oval Office (some of which were recorded and later transcribed by Whitman), summaries of telephone conversations (which Whitman frequently monitored), and records of the president's pre-press conference briefings. Although most of the materials in this file cover the years 1958-61, there are scattered documents dated earlier and later. The Whitman file, of course, is augmented by the far larger collection of materials housed in other files, including Eisenhower's Pre-Presidential Papers [hereafter, EPP], the White House Central Files, which total some six million pages, and the private papers of members of his administration, friends, and advisers. Eisenhower's correspondence during the war years, the occupation, and his tenure as army chief of staff appear in The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower [hereafter, Eisenhower Papers], 9 vols. (Baltimore, 1970-). Numerous Eisenhower diary entries, drawn from both the Whitman file and other collections, have also recently been published; see Robert H. Ferrell, ed., The Eisenhower Diaries (New York, 1981).
capitalist and underdeveloped nations. Although he did not accept the inevitability of such conflicts, he did recognize that "the principal contradiction in the whole system comes about because of the inability of men to forego immediate gain for a long time good," and he worried that "we do not yet have a sufficient number of people who are ready to make the immediate sacrifice in favor of a long-term investment."4

Modern organization proved an especially difficult dilemma for Eisenhower. He extolled the new forms of corporate organization, the purpose of which, as he saw it, was "to produce orderliness, which means restriction upon irresponsible human action," but he feared that organization also posed grave dangers for traditional economic and political liberties. If organization was necessary for the orderly conduct of human affairs, it was nevertheless "difficult to define the exact line of demarcation between rules of conduct on the one hand, and unjustifiable seizure of power on the other." Even more threatening was the prospect that organized interests—"pressure groups," he usually called them—would impose their narrow ends upon the state or that the state itself would become little more than a battleground for class conflict. As he told a Columbia University audience in 1948, "danger arises from too great a concentration of power in the hands of any individual or group: The power of concentrated finance, the power of selfish pressure groups, the power of any class organized in opposition to the whole—any one of these, when allowed to dominate is fully capable of destroying individual freedom."5

For Eisenhower, as for other postwar conservatives, the dangers of such politicized conflict were all too readily apparent. Indeed, the Democratic party of the New and Fair Deals, built through appeals to selfish class interest, seemed to embody all of the most threatening tendencies of American democracy. In his inaugural address as president of Columbia in 1948, Eisenhower decried "demagogic appeals to class selfishness, greed, and hate" and warned against what he called "a regimented statism." Six months later, in a commencement address, he attacked "pressure groups" and politicians who appealed "to all that was selfish in human-kind." Speaking to the American Bar Association in September 1949—an address to which he returned in later years as the touchstone of his political philosophy—he denounced Marxist concepts of class conflict and called for the defense of freedom from "the unbearable selfishness of vested interest" and from "the blindness of those who, protesting devotion to the public welfare, falsely declare that only government can bring us happiness, security and opportunity."6

Eisenhower nevertheless believed that the clash of classes was neither necessary

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5 Eisenhower to Robinson, February 12, 1952; and Inaugural Address, Columbia University, October 12, 1948, DDEL, EPP, Speech series, box 1.

6 Inaugural Address, October 12, 1948; Commencement Address, Columbia University, June 1, 1949, DDEL, EPP, Speech series, box 1; Speech to the American Bar Association, September 5, 1949; and Eisenhower to George Whitney, September 4, 1951, DDEL, EP, box 115.
nor inexorable. Indeed, the great lesson of the twentieth century was, for him at least, the interdependence of class interests, not their irreconcilability. "In our tightly knit economy, all professions and callings—no matter how widely separated they may be in purpose and technique—all have points of contact and areas of common interest," he declared in 1947. "Banker or housewife, farmer, carpenter, soldier—no one of us can live and act without effect on all the others." In early 1952 he suggested to businessman George Sloan "that agriculture, labor, management and capital frequently speak of themselves as if each were a separate and self-sufficient enterprise or community. Yet the simple fact is that each is helpless without the others; only as an effective member of an integrated team can any one of them prosper." Maximum production was possible "only when management, labor and capital work in harmony . . . ; no prosperity for one economic group is permanently possible except as all groups prosper." Drawing heavily, though perhaps unconsciously, on the social thought of Herbert Hoover, Eisenhower repeatedly called for voluntary cooperation among America's diverse economic interests. Competition and self-interest, he insisted, must be "accompanied by a readiness to cooperate wholeheartedly for the performance of community and national functions." Indeed, the secret of American success in World War II, he declared on another occasion, was that "Americans welded into a cooperative unit the enterprise, initiative, spirit and will of many million free men and women." As William E. Robinson, a close friend, noted in 1948, Eisenhower believed in "rugged individualism in the old-fashioned Republican sense of the word" but in "freedom and independence for the individual with its collateral responsibility for cooperation." At Columbia, one of his proudest achievements was the creation of the American Assembly, in which he hoped the leaders of business, labor, government, and the professions would meet to study and plan cooperatively for the future. "We must find a way," he told the American Academy of Political Science in 1950, "to bring big business, labor, professions and government officials together with . . . experts and . . . study and work out these problems in the calmness of a nonpartisan . . . atmosphere."

From his fears of class conflict and from his vision of a mutually cooperative, voluntarist society came Eisenhower's commitment to what he called "the middle way," a phrase that dominated almost all of his thinking after 1948. The "middle way" was not just a political platitude but rather signified his struggle to resolve the fundamental tensions of the modern state. The term defined not only a political position—between capital and labor, between entrepreneurial liberalism and socialism, between the Republican Right and the Democratic Left—but also a series of programmatic commitments and a style of leadership. Initially, the "middle way"

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8 Inaugural Address, October 12, 1948; Speech to the American Bar Association, September 5, 1949; Commencement Address, June 1, 1949; Robinson to Helen Rogers Reid, June 21, 1948, DDEL, Robinson Papers, box 9.

entailed arresting the momentum of New Deal liberalism and ensuring, as he wrote a prominent business supporter, that "our economy . . . remain, to the greatest possible extent, in private hands." In his diary, and in conversations and correspondence with friends, he worried about the dangerous "drift toward statism," a trend that, he declared, "must be halted in its tracks." Yet he was also cautious enough and realistic enough to realize that this could not be done abruptly. He agreed with former president Hoover, who warned him in early 1953 that it would be impossible to accomplish a dramatic reversal and that the best that the new administration could hope to achieve would be a gradual "flattening of the curve of this particular trend." He believed, moreover, that at least some forms of state action were not only expedient but necessary. Government must, he argued, "prevent or correct abuses springing from the unregulated practice of a private economy" and must provide laws "necessary to an orderly and a measurably free life." The complexities of modern economic life "require the application to all of us of commonly agreed-upon rules and regulations in order that the accidents of mass production will not defeat or destroy the right of the individual to political and economic freedom." More importantly, he believed that government should actively promote social harmony and encourage those mutually beneficial, voluntary, and cooperative activities that lay at the center of his vision of the good society; the essence of citizenship entailed "blend[ing], without coercion, the individual good and the common good." Above all, he told the American Bar Association, "we need more economic understanding and working arrangements that will bind labor and management . . . into a far tighter voluntary cooperative unit than we now have." The task of leadership, he wrote, was to bring "diversities together in a common purpose." The greatest obstacle to this corporatist commonwealth, in Eisenhower's view, was politics, a word he almost always used pejoratively to signify the selfish actions of special interests and classes. "Pressure groups," he warned a Columbia audience, "often pretend to a moral purpose that examination proves to be false. The vote-seeker rarely hesitates to appeal to all that is selfish in humankind." "When politicians begin to talk about issues," he wrote a friend, "they are often talking about those things on which they feel it expedient to make extravagant promises to various pressure groups." He distrusted popular opinion, which he believed was both uninformed and short-sighted, and he complained to friends that congressmen were oversensitive "to even transitory resentments in their several districts." The political game, he wrote his brother Edgar, was "a combination of gossip, innuendo, sly character assassination, and outright lies" in which "the demagogue tries to develop a saleable list of items to hold before the public." Disturbed by the bitter rhetoric of the 1948 election, with its fiery appeals to class interest, he

10 Eisenhower Diaries (January 14, 1949), 153–54; Eisenhower to Everett E. Hazlett, Jr., February 24, 1950, and November 14, 1951, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 17; William E. Robinson to Bruce Barton, December 13, 1949, DDEL, Robinson Papers, box 1; and Eisenhower to Sloan, March 1, 1952.

11 Eisenhower Diaries (June 22, 1959), 364–65; Speech to the American Bar Association, September 5, 1949; Eisenhower to Robinson, February 12, 1952; and Eisenhower to Sloan, March 1, 1952.

12 Inaugural Address October 12, 1948; Speech to the American Bar Association, September 5, 1949; Commencement Address, June 1, 1949; and Eisenhower to William Phillips, June 5, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 25.
confided to his diary the wish that both Democrats and Republicans would embrace the middle of the road and "choose some issues outside the nation's economy on which to fight out elections."^{13}

Eisenhower believed that the inevitable conflicts produced by the short-sighted and self-interested actions of classes and interest groups could be resolved only through the leadership of public-spirited and professionally skilled managers such as himself, who could exercise the disinterested judgment necessary to avoid calamities such as war or depression and achieve long-range goals such as peace and high productivity. The task of such leadership was to quell the passion of the masses, to encourage self-discipline on the part of business, labor, and agriculture, and to promote the pursuit of long-term, enlightened self-interest rather than immediate gain. "To induce people to do more," he wrote his close friend and former aide General Alfred M. Gruenther in May 1953, "leadership has the chore of informing people and attempting to inspire them to real sacrifice." Both at home and abroad people had to be prepared to endure hardship and discipline. The real question, as he wrote to a prominent Wall Street banker, was "whether national leaders here and abroad have the courage and strength to stand up and tell the truth and to keep repeating the truth regardless of vilification and abuse, until people at large will accept and act upon the clear facts."^{14}

Eisenhower's commitment to social harmony, self-discipline, limited government, and a depoliticized, administrative state all dictated, in turn, an approach to leadership that stressed restraint, patience, moderation, and flexibility. "I am convinced," he wrote his friend Everett ("Swede") Hazlett in 1952, "that leadership in the political as well as in other spheres consists largely in making progress through compromise." He deplored "the table-pounding, name-calling methods that columnists so much love," not so much because he feared "a good fight" but because he thought that "such methods are normally futile." In a letter to a friend, he praised Lincoln as "the greatest compromiser and astute master of expediency that we have known" and confessed that he, too, was "a bit on the pragmatic side by inclination."^{15} His belief in the mediatory role of government and his fear of popular politics was also reflected in his intense concern with public relations, which he saw not just as a means of political or personal aggrandizement but as a technique for defusing political conflict, limiting the role of the state, engineering support for administrative decisions, and forging consensus. He told the leaders of the Advertising Council in early 1953 that "the only way to avoid centralized domination" was "through an increased readiness to cooperate in the solution of group problems. As problems become more complex, we must find new ways to achieve cooperation—new mechanisms for discovering our problems and getting them

^{13} Commencement Address, June 1, 1949; Eisenhower to Paul G. Hoffman, February 9, 1952, HSTL, Hoffman Papers, box 29; Eisenhower to Clarence Dillon, January 8, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 7; Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhour, January 27, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; and Eisenhower Diaries (July 7, 1949), 162. Also see Eisenhower to George A. Sloan, January 29, 1952, DDEL, EP, box 100; and Eisenhower to Bradford C. Chynoweth, July 28, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3.

^{14} Eisenhower to Gruenther, May 4, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; and Eisenhower to Dillon, January 8, 1953.

^{15} Eisenhower to Hazlett, October 16, 1952, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 17; Eisenhower to Phillips, June 5, 1953, and Eisenhower to Chynoweth, July 20, 1954.
over to the American people.” The Advertising Council, whose conservative messages were carried annually in hundreds of thousands of so-called public service advertisements, was just such a mechanism, Eisenhower declared, “one of our great agencies for the preservation of freedom.”

Eisenhower’s belief in an American commonwealth was paralleled by a Wilsonian faith in a world order through which, as he told a London Guildhall audience in 1945, “all nations can enjoy the fruitfulness of the earth.” Like most other Wilsonians, he accompanied this idealistic vision with a fairly hard-headed grasp of America’s postwar needs. Foreign policy, he wrote a friend in late 1951, should be based primarily on “the need for the United States to obtain certain raw materials to sustain its economy, and, when possible, to preserve profitable foreign markets for our surpluses.” There is, he wrote John Foster Dulles in 1953, a “direct connection between a prosperous and happy America and the execution of an intelligent foreign policy.” Like other prominent American leaders, he feared communism not only as a military menace but also as an economic threat that would close off to America “the great industrial complex of Western Europe” and the raw material-producing nations of Africa and Asia. “Where [then] would we get the materials needed for our existence,” he asked a friend in 1951. Here too, he wrote in his diary in the summer of 1953, America confronted what Marxists called the “contradictions of capitalism,” both the conflict among “capitalist states for the domination of the world’s surface” and the conflict “between the advanced, industrialized nations of the world and the dependent masses of backward peoples.” Here too, in Eisenhower’s view, the conflict, though real, was necessary and inexorable only if nations could not abandon their immediate selfish interests for mutual cooperation. As in domestic affairs he believed that politics was principally the expression of selfish interests and that the task of leadership was “to bring men and nations to the point where they will give to the long-term promise the same value that they give to immediate and individual gains.” If we could resolve the issues of world trade and cooperation on the basis of the “long-term good of all,” he concluded, “we could laugh at the other so-called ‘contradictions’ in

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As Supreme Commander during World War II and later as army chief of staff Eisenhower had repeatedly lectured his subordinates on the importance of good public relations. His job as president of Columbia was also, he believed, in large measure one of public relations. He was himself, by virtually every account, a master of the art, including the skillful and highly self-conscious management of his own image. When he began his campaign for the presidency, he drew about him not only prominent figures from banking and industry but also men and women from advertising, publishing, and public relations. He made more use of professional advertising and public relations in that campaign than any previous candidate in American history. “After watching Ike deal with the press, I don’t think he needs a public-relations advisor,” wrote Harry G. Butcher, who during World War II served as a public relations aide to Eisenhower; Butcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower (New York, 1946), 20. Also see Robinson to John S. D. Eisenhower, November 22, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 29. Among Eisenhower’s close political advisors were William E. Robinson (an advertising and sales executive at the New York Herald Tribune, who later headed his own public relations firm and still later served as president of Coca Cola), Sigurd S. Larson (president of the large Young & Rubicam Advertising Agency, which handled, among other accounts, Citizens for Eisenhower during the primary campaign), and Paul G. Hoffman (who had risen
our system, and . . . be so secure against the Communist menace that it would gradually dry up and wither away."

Like most prominent internationalists, Eisenhower generally supported the foreign and military policies of the Truman administration, yet here, too, his thinking was characterized by balance, moderation, and concern for long-term consequences. Thus, in endorsing the diplomacy of containment, he nevertheless remained more pacific than most of his military and civilian contemporaries. America must not seek "to preserve order in the sense of the Roman Peace, where one nation, due to its dominant position in the world, rules all others," he warned newspaper columnist Dorothy Thompson. To his father-in-law, he wrote, "We are traveling a long and rocky road toward a satisfactory world order but the big thing is that we never give up for an instant. No war can be anything else but a grave setback to such progress. The one thing that troubles me is the readiness of people to discuss war as a means of advancing peace. To me this is a contradiction in terms." Eisenhower did not share the feeling of vulnerability that pervaded so much of the military during the early postwar era. "It is a grievous error to forget for one second the might and power of this great Republic," he cautioned Walter Bedell Smith in late 1947. He believed that both Soviet power and intent were limited and that in dealing with the Russians the United States ought to employ "patience, tolerance and a spirit of understanding." Following the Berlin blockade and Korea, he adopted a more hardline attitude toward the Russians, but he refused even then to be stampeded by those who believed that Armageddon was just around the corner.

He believed in military preparedness, but only in moderation. As army chief of staff he had worked on behalf of military unification and universal military training and had attempted, without success, to restrain the abrupt contraction of defense budgets that followed the end of the war. He nevertheless believed that resources were limited and that armed forces were, as he put it, "nonproductive, sterile organizations whose purposes are, at the best, largely negative." By early 1952, following the rapid military expansion that accompanied the Korean War, he

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18 Eisenhower to Thompson, June 25, 1946, in Eisenhower Papers, 7: 1149-50; Eisenhower to John Sheldon Doud, August 23, 1946, ibid., 8: 1249-50; and Eisenhower to Smith, November 28, 1947, ibid., 2084-85.
was worried over the expenditure of "unconscionable sums" for an indefinite duration. As in foreign and domestic affairs, concern for the enduring integrity of the system was the controlling issue. Every expenditure, he insisted, "must be weighed and gauged in the light of probable long-term internal effect." Here again, however, selfish interests often threatened the collective good. The danger arose not just from the short-sighted partisanship of congressional budget-cutters but oftentimes from the service bureaucracies themselves. During World War II and again during the battles over unification and joint strategic planning, Eisenhower struggled to strike a balance among the competing claims of the services, and his letters and diaries are filled with angry denunciations of military self-interest. Here too, reconciliation of conflict and pursuit of the national interest rested with disinterested professional leadership and with the self-discipline and commitment to long-term goals of competing parties.

For Eisenhower, then, the corporate commonwealth was not just a series of vague generalities, but a broad, internally consistent, social philosophy that brought together an interpretation of America’s recent past, a vision of the good society both at home and abroad, and a style of leadership through which such an order might be obtained.

Eisenhower’s vision of a corporate commonwealth did not, of course, originate with him. Indeed, variations of this concept—with its emphasis on organization, cooperation, and social harmony—go back at least to the Progressive era and the National Civic Federation, to the businessmen such as Bernard M. Baruch and Gerard Swope who served on the War Industries Board during the First World War, to Herbert Hoover and his advocacy of the “associative state,” to Edward Filene, Henry S. Dennison, and other apostles of welfare capitalism in the 1920s, and to the big businessmen who during the New Deal joined the Department of Commerce’s Business Advisory Council (BAC) and helped shape the structure and operation of the National Recovery Administration. Common to all of these activities was an attempt to fashion a new corporative economy that would avoid both the destructive disorder of unregulated capitalism and the threat to business autonomy posed by socialism.

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20 Eisenhower Diaries (July 24, 1947), 142; ibid. (January 8, 1949), 152; ibid. (January 27, 1949), 154–55; and Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, April 7, 1949, and February 24, 1950, DDEL, EP, Name series, box 1. "There are few people outside the Armed Services and the higher echelons of the State Department that are giving their full attention to American interests as a whole and refusing to color their conclusions and convictions with the interests of party politics," he wrote Walter Bedell Smith in late 1947. "I should like to be numbered among this disinterested group." Eisenhower to Smith, September 18, 1947, in Eisenhower Papers, 9: 1933–34.
21 Ellis W. Hawley has defined a "corporative system" as "one whose basic units consist of officially recognized, non-competitive, role-ordered occupational or functional groupings . . . , one with coordinating machinery designed to integrate these units into an interdependent whole and one where the state properly functions as coordinator, assistant, and midwife rather than director or regulator. In such a system there are deep interpenetrations between state and society, and enjoying a special status is an enlightened social elite, capable of perceiving social needs and imperatives and assisting social groups to meet them.
In spite of their considerable power and prestige, "corporate liberals" remained a minority voice in national politics and even within the business community itself. By the mid-1930s, moreover, the depression and the sometime radicalism of the New Deal had disrupted their attempts to forge an alliance between business and government. After 1934 all but a handful of business leaders abandoned efforts at collaboration with the Roosevelt administration, while the president, in turn, now excoriated the "economic royalists." World War II, however, served to reinvigorate corporate liberalism. Mobilization brought thousands of executives into government, effectively dampened New Deal criticism, and created, at least temporarily, the kind of partnership between business and government that corporate liberals had long extolled. In addition, the wartime revival of corporate liberalism gave birth to important new organizations, such as the Committee for Economic Development (CED) and the Advertising Council.\footnote{Robert M. Collins, The Business Response to Keynes, 1929–1964 (New York, 1981); and Griffin, "The Selling of America."}

The relationship of corporate liberals to the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, however, remained uneasy. On the one hand, they welcomed cooperation between business and government and recognized that the state could serve as a powerful positive instrument for moderating economic conflict, regulating domestic markets, promoting international trade, and sustaining economic growth. On the other, they feared that the popularity of the New Deal and the power of its progressive constituencies might lead, piecemeal, to a semisocialist state whose fiscal and regulatory policies would ultimately destroy private enterprise. As William Benton, one of the founders of the Committee for Economic Development, wrote in 1944, the leaders of government ought to "rid the economy of injurious or unnecessary regulation, as well as administration that is hostile or harmful," and pursue "constructive fiscal, monetary and other policies that provide a climate in which a private enterprise system can flourish." Businessmen, for their part, he continued, must learn to cooperate with government in the exercise of...
those powers that had become clearly necessary in a modern economy and display a “high degree of imagination, goodwill and inventiveness” in order to work out “improved rules of the game.” If business failed to plan for the postwar, warned Paul G. Hoffman, another CED founder, “the Government will be forced to step in, and collectivism will come to postwar America—by default rather than design.” “We must plan carefully and strike hard,” one of Hoffman’s business correspondents bluntly wrote. “Otherwise the new dealers will plan for all of us.”

The strategic problem faced by corporate liberals in the postwar era was, thus, how to obtain the benefits of state intervention, while avoiding its dangers. Their immediate, tactical problem was how to win political power in an era still dominated by the passionate and well-remembered struggles of the 1930s. Not surprisingly, they quickly discovered in Eisenhower the solution to both dilemmas. As a widely admired war hero, he was pre-eminently electable. More importantly, as they were soon to discover, his political and economic views in many ways closely approximated their own.

No single generalization covers all the men and women who rallied about Eisenhower in the late 1940s, but the great majority of them were corporate liberals for whom the goals of cooperation and consensus were paramount, who saw in the New Deal a potentially dangerous threat to corporate enterprise, and who sought to refashion the federal state to their own needs. Some were progressive manufacturers such as Hoffman of Studebaker, Thomas J. Watson of I.B.M., Philip D. Reed of General Electric, and Harry A. Bullis of General Mills. Others, such as Clifford Roberts and John Hay Whitney, represented the financial community. Still others—William E. Robinson, Douglas M. Black, Eugene Meyer, and the Ogden Reid family—were in what might loosely be called “cultural production”—journalism, publishing, advertising, and public relations. Almost all were associated with the “internationalist” wing of the Republican party and frequently held membership in such groups as the Business Advisory Council, the Committee for Economic Development, the Advertising Council, and the Council on Foreign Relations. Most of them would have agreed with William Robinson, who wrote Eisenhower in 1951 that the managerial revolution had created in America a new form of economic democracy in which management acted as “a referee between the three major elements in our economy—the customer, the worker and the capitalist”—or with Edward J. Bermingham, who insisted that “capitalism” was an inadequate description for the American economy, which was “an overall system of individual endeavor profitable to management, labor, and ownership, with vast numbers of labor among the stockholders and thus having ownership in their business.” They shared Eisenhower’s concern over “the insidious

inclination toward statism” and enthusiastically endorsed his call for “middle-of-the-road” government.25

These influential business and political leaders were convinced, out of both ideology and expediency, that the election of Eisenhower was a necessity. On the one hand, they greatly feared the implications of continued Democratic rule; on the other, they distrusted the views of Republican Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, especially on foreign policy. More importantly, they were certain he could not win. As Eisenhower later recalled in a letter to his brother Edgar,

In 1948, ’49, ’50, ’51 and early ’52, many hundreds of people were urging me to go into politics. Scores of different reasons were advanced as to why I should do so, but in general they all boiled down to something as follows: “The country is going socialist so rapidly that, unless Republicans can get in immediately and defeat this trend, our country is gone. Four more years of New Dealism and there will be no turning back. This is our last chance.”26

No one put it more bluntly than Thomas E. Dewey, who in 1949 told Eisenhower that only he could “save this country from going to Hades in the handbasket of paternalism-socialism-dictatorship.” The problem, declared the twice-defeated presidential aspirant, was that, although “all middle-class citizens of education have a common belief that tendencies toward centralization and paternalism must be halted and reversed, no one who voices these views can be elected.” This meant, Dewey continued, that “we must look around for someone of great popularity and who has not frittered away his political assets by taking positive stands against national planning, etc., etc. Elect such a man to the Presidency, after which he must lead us back to safe channels and paths.”27

The support of business men such as Robinson and Hoffman, publishers such as Helen Rogers Reid and Henry Luce, and politicians such as Dewey and Henry Cabot Lodge became absolutely critical to the Eisenhower campaign. These men and women not only convinced Eisenhower that he had a duty to run for the presidency but also reinforced his views on political economy, marshalled enormous financial and editorial support for his candidacy, and managed to force his nomination upon the reluctant regulars of the Republican party. Taft was more correct than not when he bitterly complained in the wake of the Republican convention that Eisenhower had been installed by “the power of the New York financial interests and a large number of businessmen subject to New York


26 Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, May 2, 1956, DDEL, EFP, DDE Diaries series, box 9. Clarence Dillon wrote that Eisenhower was “the one best hope for the salvation of Western Civilization as we know it”; Dillon, as quoted in Robinson to Eisenhower, December 21, 1950, DDEL, Robinson Papers, box 11. Clifford Roberts urged Eisenhower to help arrest “the current trend of socialism and the serious threats to our liberty”; Roberts, Memo, January 1950. And, according to Paul Hoffman, only Eisenhower could “redeem the Republican Party”; Hoffman to Eisenhower, December 5, 1951. Also see Eisenhower Diaries (October 1949–February 1952), 165–205 passim.

27 Eisenhower Diaries (July 7, 1949), 161–62 (italics in original MS). Clare Booth Luce told Eisenhower approximately the same thing; Eisenhower Diaries (September 27, 1949), 168.
influence" and by the nation's great newspaper, many of which "turned themselves into propaganda sheets." The concept of a corporate commonwealth was, then, not just an exercise in political platitudes but an ideology that rationalized a critically important development in American economic life and mobilized a powerful constituency behind the election of Eisenhower as president of the United States.

The vision of a corporate commonwealth, which was the touchstone of Eisenhower's political philosophy and which drew to his support so many progressive capitalists, also shaped the policies and politics of his administration. As president, Eisenhower sought to create a noncoercive, self-disciplined, and harmonious corporate society by limiting the New Deal state, forging cooperative relations between business and government, promoting social harmony and consensus at home, and maintaining a stable and Western-oriented international order abroad. These efforts represented a serious, in many ways even sophisticated, attempt to escape the dilemmas created by modern economic organization. They also revealed the sharp limitations of such an ideology, its class bias, and its profoundly antidemocratic character.

Eisenhower believed that the federal state posed a dangerous threat to economic liberties, and he was determined to arrest the growth of government and slowly but firmly to "bend the curve" away from public enterprise. He lifted wage-price controls, initiated new policies to prevent government competition with business, reduced the federal budget and lowered taxes on industry and capital. He signed legislation turning over oil-rich "submerged lands" to the states and strongly supported deregulation of natural gas. He withdrew federal opposition to private hydroelectric development in Idaho and California and sought to prevent further expansion of the Tennessee Valley Authority. In the critical new field of nuclear energy, he sponsored legislation that ended exclusive federal control of development.

Eisenhower was not, however, a conservative ideologue, intent on returning the

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28 Taft, Memorandum on the 1952 Campaign. Library of Congress, Robert A. Taft Papers, box 1349. "It is hard for me to understand the attitudes of the businessmen, bankers and editors who seem to be determined to defeat any real Republican administration." wrote a bitter Taft shortly after his defeat; Taft to Hugh Bidder, August 8, 1952, State Historical Society of Nebraska, Lincoln, Hugh A. Butler Papers, box 363. Taft was only partially correct, according to William Robinson, who later recalled that "Wall Street was about 3-to-1 in his corner." Taft was, however, "right about the newspapers. But what he didn't know was that some of us had been building up 'cells' of Eisenhower interest and enthusiasm among editors and publishers in every nook and corner of the country since about 1947. It is not strange that the Senator would not have known about this, since only a handful of people was even aware of it." Robinson to Eisenhower, DDEL, EPP, November 25, 1954, Name series, box 29.

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nation's economic relations to those of 1900. He clearly recognized that the state must play an active role in sustaining high productivity and employment. As he wrote his brother Milton in early 1954, "Maintenance of prosperity is one field of governmental concern that interests me mightily and one on which I have talked incessantly to associates, advisers, and assistants ever since last January. In these days I am sure that government has to be the principal coordinator and, in many cases, the actual operator for the many things that the approach of depression would demand." Like most conservatives, however, he feared inflation more than unemployment and was willing to accept slower growth and higher joblessness in return for wage and price stability. He preferred to act cautiously and often indirectly, avoiding a highly visible or intrusive federal presence. He believed strongly, moreover, in the necessity for self-discipline on the part of both business and labor. As he declared in 1957, the national interest must take precedence over the temporary advantages that might be secured by particular groups at the expense of all the people. "Should we persistently fail to discipline ourselves," he warned, "there would be inexorable pressure for government to intervene and "freedom will step by step disappear.""


30 "Means available to the government include revision of tax laws to promote consumption, extension of credit and assuring of low interest rates; vigorous liberalization of all social security measures, extension of all kinds of reinsurance plans, as well as direct loans and grants; acceleration of construction programs involving everything from multiple purpose dams, irrigation projects, military equipment and public buildings on the one hand, to increased expenditures for soil conservation, upstream water storage and public housing on the other. There are, of course, other things the Government can and would do."

31 Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, January 6, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 12. Eisenhower's attentiveness to economic issues is revealed in frequent discussions with the Cabinet and, to a lesser extent, in meetings with Congressional leaders, in memoranda and private correspondence in the DDE Diaries series, and in extensive correspondence with economic advisers such as Arthur Burns and Gabriel Hauge, much of which is located in the Eisenhower Library, EPP, Administration series, boxes 9, 10, 19.


Eisenhower was also committed to at least maintaining the modest social welfare programs that had emerged from the New Deal. "Social gains," he told the Western Governors' Conference in 1952, were "not an issue any more" but a necessary "floor that covers the pit of disaster." He recognized what he called "the practical necessity of establishing some kind of security for individuals in a specialized and highly industrialized age" and criticized business leaders who in the past had been "far too slow to understand the implications of the continuing social revolution" as well as "far too apt to take a completely indefinite, if not essentially a selfishly cruel, attitude toward the whole question." He also had a keen sense of the experience of such programs. As he patiently explained to Edgar Eisenhower, the most conservative of the brothers, "Should any political party attempt to abolish Social Security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history."

In 1954, at his urging, Congress expanded Social Security to as many as seven and a half million additional Americans, bringing fully five-sixths of the nation's paid work force under the law's provisions. He was less successful, however, in extending the minimum wage, despite his request that coverage be broadened to include "millions of low-paid workers now exempted," Congress declined to act. As late as 1960, minimum-wage protection applied only to a little over one-half of the nation's wage workers.

Eisenhower's support for social welfare programs nevertheless remained sharply limited by his reluctance to enlarge the federal budget, raise taxes, or initiate new programs, the responsibility for which, in his view, lay clearly with the states. He strongly opposed national health care, proposing instead a plan whereby the government would reinsure private insurance companies against heavy losses in order to encourage them to expand their coverage. He was reluctant to endorse federal aid to education, justifying his support for the National Defense Act of 1958 by stressing the "national security aspect" of the program and what he called "the dominating need for scientists." During the last years of his presidency, fearful of inflation and facing large Democratic majorities in Congress, he waged a stubborn

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49 Oveta Culp Hobby, Memorandum for the President, May 14, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 20. For the views of the insurance industry's chief lobbyist, see Eugene M. Thorey, Address of May 5, 1954, ibid. Even this modest proposal drew sharp opposition from the American Medical Association, which effectively blocked its passage. "How in the hell is the American Medical Association going to stop socialized medicine if they oppose such bills as this," declared an angry Eisenhower. "If they [the American people] don't get a bill like this, they will go for socialized medicine sooner or later and the Medical Association will have no one to blame but itself." James C. Hagerty Diary, July 14 and 19, 1954, DDEL, Hagerty Papers, box 1. A subsequent proposal, put forth by Hobby's successor, Marion Forsom, urged the relaxation of antitrust laws in order to enable insurance companies to pool their resources and thereby extend coverage, but this, too, made little headway; Congress and the Nation, 1945–1964, 1153; and James L. Sundquist, Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years (Washington, 1968), 292–93.

15 On the NDEA, see Cabinet meeting, December 2, 1957, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 10; and Legislative Leadership meeting, December 4, 1957, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 2. For the
and often effective battle against the further expansion of social welfare programs: "In my special seat I feel that it is not enough to know that an activity and its expenditure are merely desirable. We must be quite clear in the establishment of priorities so that these things can be done at a rate and in a sequence that will conform to the fiscal facts, as well as the clear requirements, of a nation that operates, primarily, on the free enterprise system." During the years of his presidency, federal transfer payments, the surest index to social welfare policy, remained unchanged as a percentage of the federal budget.  

EISENHOWER COMBINED HIS ATTEMPT to limit the role of the federal state with a strong and pervasive emphasis on cooperation between business and government. He drew about him a cabinet whose members he hoped would share his own faith in partnership and corporate self-government; he appointed representatives of business and industry to important regulatory boards and commissions; and he greatly expanded the government's already elaborate network of industrial advisory committees. The influence of existing groups such as the Business Advisory Council (BAC) and the National Petroleum Council was increased, while many new advisory committees were created. At the Department of Commerce, for example, Secretary Sinclair Weeks announced, following wide consultation with industry and trade association leaders, the creation of a new Business and Services Administration, which would preside over an extensive network of advisory committees designed to help allocate materials required by defense and atomic energy programs and make recommendations on applications for accelerated tax amortization, federal loan assistance, stockpiling, and other matters. Every department, Eisenhower assured the BAC in early 1953, was engaged in organizing similar bodies on a more or less formal or informal basis. Similarly, the famous stag dinners to which he invited the leaders of America's great corporations were not just ritual celebrations of success but meetings at which Eisenhower hoped to  

importance of scientific and engineering training in the minds of the president and his advisers. see Thomas S. Nichols, Memorandum for the President, April 26, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 30; Bryce C. Harlow, Memorandum for the Record (of discussion between Eisenhower and David Sarnoff), April 26, 1956, ibid., box 19; and Memorandum for the President (on the Report of the President's Committee on Education beyond the High School), October 23, 1957, ibid., box 16. For a recent study of the NDEA, see Barbara Barksdale Clove, Brainpower for the Cold War: The Spanish Crisis and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Westport, Conn., 1981).  


37 Eisenhower's appointments were more heavily Protestant (85 percent) than were Truman's, more likely to be political independents (20 percent), more likely to be recruited from the private sector (over 70 percent), and more likely to be from elite educational institutions. Indeed, despite the educational backgrounds of Roosevelt and Kennedy, "the Ivy influence was at its peak under Eisenhower." David T. Stanley et al., Men Who Govern: A Biographical Profile of Federal Political Executives (Washington, 1967), 16–32, passim; On Eisenhower's appointments to regulatory boards and commissions, see Engler, The Politics of Oil, 323–25, 330–31, passim; David A. Frier, Conflict of Interest in the Eisenhower Administration (Ames, Iowa, 1969); and Bernard Schwartz, The Professor and the Commission (New York, 1959), 140–48, passim. For an excellent discussion of the evolution of the advisory system, see Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (New York, 1966), chap. 8. For Eisenhower's remarks to the BAC, see Eisenhower Public Papers (March 18, 1953), 1: 103. The use of industry advisory committees and unpaid consultants ("WOCs," meaning "without compensation") was extensively investigated by critical Democrats in Congress; see U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, 84th Cong., 2d sess., Committee on the Judiciary, Anti-Trust Subcommittee, Interim Report . . . on WOCs and Government Advisory Groups (Washington, 1956).
exchange views with men whose opinions he respected and whose support was indispensable to his broader purposes. He hoped, it seems clear, that such gatherings would also stimulate business leaders to think in broad, cooperative terms and not just according to their more immediate and parochial interests.38

Eisenhower's stress on cooperation and industrial self-government was nowhere better revealed than in his approach to fiscal and monetary policy. Although he believed that the state should play an important role in maintaining prosperity, he also believed in what he called "shared responsibility" between business and government. During the recession of 1954 he privately urged bankers to lower interest rates and make credit more easily available; in 1955 he attempted, unsuccessfully, to persuade auto industry leaders to restrain prices and production; during the recession years of 1954 and 1958 he enlisted the services of the Advertising Council, which launched massive advertising campaigns designed to promote "Confidence in a Growing America, and, though never explicitly stated, confidence in the administration as well; and in 1958–59 he quietly sought to organize corporate leaders behind his wage and price stabilization policies.39

The administration of antitrust policy under Eisenhower was characterized, similarly, by the widespread use of premerger conferences, consent decrees, and premerger clearances, all of which emphasized cooperation and quiet negotiation. When business complaints of harassment reached the president, moreover, he admonished Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr., to reassure the business community as to "the true attitude of this Administration," which was that "continued prosperity and growth of the economy" could come "only through the cooperation of labor, management and government, and that such cooperation requires a readiness of all parties to observe the law (or to seek legislative changes in it) but the avoidance on the part of government of all kinds of petty annoyances brought about merely by personal bias."40


39 On bankers and credit, see George Whitney to Eisenhower, June 18, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 43; Whitney to George Humphrey, July 27, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 22; and Cabinet Meeting, June 11, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 3. On the automobile industry, see George Humphrey to William Mc. Martin, April 24, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 23; and Eisenhower to Arthur Burns, March 20, 1958, ibid., box 10. On the Advertising Council, see James R. Lambie, Jr., to Sherman Adams, December 9, 1953, DDEL, Lambie Records, box 3; Max Fox to Theodore S. Reppplier, April 5, 1954, ibid., box 12; Paul West to Sherman Adams, March 12, 1954, ibid. Also see Griffith, "The Selling of America," 31–45. Eisenhower also sought to enlist the Advertising Council in the fight against inflation, but with much more limited success. On Eisenhower's efforts to recruit business leaders in the campaign against inflation, see, for example, Eisenhower to Robert Anderson, November 3, 1958, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 92; Eisenhower to Richard K. Mellon, October 6, 1958, ibid., box 22; and Eisenhower to Frank Stanton, February 23, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 39. Eisenhower told Mellon that "only by getting into politics up to our necks can we reverse these unfortunate trends" favored by Americans for Democratic Action and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. On the 1959–60 effort to enlist business support on behalf of wage and price stabilization, also see W. Allen Wallis to Richard M. Nixon, July 29, 1959, DDEL, W. Allen Wallis Records, box 3; Wallis to H. Bruce Palmer, January 29, 1960, ibid., and Progress Report, The Council for Economic Growth and Security, Inc. (January 1960), ibid.

40 Eisenhower to Brownell, June 12, 1957, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 8. For an extremely
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The very success of such strategies, of course, depended on the ability and willingness of business leaders to exercise restraint and discipline. Eisenhower fully understood the enormous power of modern business and how decisions made by corporate boards could affect "the whole life of the United States." He understood also, as he told economic adviser Gabriel Hauge, how such a situation "could be very dangerous unless people act with the greatest wisdom and concert for the nation." His speeches, his conversations, and his private correspondence are literally filled with appeals for corporate "statesmanship" and responsibility. Nothing so angered him, moreover, as what he considered corporate short-sightedness—the demand by some business groups for tax reduction regardless of the fiscal consequences, the pressure for tariff protection from inefficient producers, the refusal of steel and auto industry leaders to hold down prices, the unwillingness of the automakers to smooth out production and help stabilize the business cycle. When in mid-1955 steel companies announced an increase in steel prices of seven dollars per ton, he told Ann Whitman that he was "pretty disgusted with businessmen and didn't know when he would get over it." He was outraged by the heavy-handed lobbying and even bribery that accompanied the drive for deregulation of natural gas and that compelled him to veto a bill he otherwise favored. "I want to give business a honorable place," he angrily declared, "but they make crooks out of themselves." To the cabinet he worried aloud about "the contradiction that existed when the greatest exponents of a free economy failed to exercise the restraint necessary to a free economy."

Yet even successful instances of corporate cooperation did not, as Eisenhower assumed they would, necessarily produce results that transcended corporate self-interest. In housing and urban affairs, for example, Eisenhower turned for assistance to a national advisory committee recruited for the most part from among realtors, builders, and bankers—groups notoriously hostile to public housing though not to other forms of federal intervention such as FHA and urban renewal. The Housing Act of 1954 and other administration programs, not surprisingly, reflected the political agenda of these powerful groups. In the case of the federal

sympathetic, if unpersuasive, account of Eisenhower's antitrust policies, see Theodore P. Kovaleff, Business and Government during the Eisenhower Administration: A Study of the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department (Athens, Ohio, 1980). The administration's handling of the critical oil cartel case well illustrates its emphasis on negotiation and cooperative arrangements as well as the generally low priority it gave to antitrust enforcement; see Burton I. Kaufman, The Oil Cartel Case: A Documentary Study of Antitrust Activity in the Cold War Era (Westport, Conn., 1978), 50–101.

42 Whitman Diary, June 1, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 8, Whitman Diary, February 13, March 15, 1956, ibid., box 6, Eisenhower, Telephone conversation with George Humphrey, January 31, 1956, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diary series, box 7; Jack Z. Anderson, Memorandum for the Record, June 19, 1958, ibid., box 20; Cabinet meeting, June 5, 1958, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 2; Cabinet meeting, December 14, 1956, ibid., box 6; and Memorandum of a Conversation between the President and T. S. Repplier, August 3, 1955, DDEL, Lambe Records, box 23.

43 The Housing Act of 1949 had authorized construction of 135,000 public housing units per year, a rate never reached because of the intervention of the Korean War. Some 58,000 units were constructed in 1955, reflecting commitments entered into during the last years of the Truman administration. By contrast, construction fell off sharply during the Eisenhower years, averaging between 10,000 and 20,000 units per year. By the end of the decade, critics could rightly charge that far more poor people had been displaced through urban renewal than could be housed in newly constructed public housing. See Mark I. Gelfand, A
highway program, Eisenhower decided to name an advisory committee chaired by his close friend Lucius Clay, which he hoped would possess a national view of highway development and would therefore surmount the more parochial interests of truckers, auto clubs, state highway engineers, car manufacturers, oil companies, and others whose inability to reach agreement had deadlocked federal policy for more than a decade. The committee’s report did receive broad support, and the bill that passed one year later embodied some, though by no means all, of its major recommendations. The Clay report and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 also revealed, however, the sharp limitations of corporate stewardship; for, although the Clay committee took a broad, national view, that view was nevertheless narrowly circumscribed by those corporate and professional elites who saw highways solely as a means of moving more automobiles and trucks more cheaply and efficiently. The report, and subsequent Congressional testimony, was silent concerning the impact of such massive highway construction on the ecology of cities, on land use patterns and tax bases, on slum clearance and housing, on renewal and redevelopment, and on urban mass transportation. Thus, the program, though producing enormous growth in the auto, oil, construction, and other related industries, laid an enormous if immeasurable tax upon the American people in the form of disintegrating cities, declining public transportation, air pollution, and wasteful energy consumption.44

In natural resource development, Eisenhower sought to replace what he called an “exclusive dependence on Federal bureaucracy” with “a partnership of state and local communities, private citizens, and the Federal Government, all working together.” In practice, the “private citizens” involved were almost always large private utilities, owned and controlled by financial interests in New York, Boston, and other metropolitan districts; “local” rural electric cooperatives were actively discouraged, as were “partnerships” between cooperatives and federal power projects. Similarly, the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which authorized the licensing of private corporations to produce and market nuclear electric power while explicitly prohibiting the Atomic Energy Commission from doing so, made it certain that the future development of this important new resource would be

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44 Both Eisenhower and the Clay Committee had recommended financing highway construction through revenue bonds, but this proposal was blocked in Congress. The final measure incorporated a Democratic-sponsored, “pay as you go” tax on highway users, to be administered through a Highway Trust Fund. Although this approach disappointed economic advisers such as Arthur Burns and John H. Bragdon, who had hoped to use highway construction as a countercyclical tool, it gained support from George Humphrey, Sinclair Weeks, and finally Eisenhower himself. It did, as Eisenhower desired, insulate highway finance from the federal budget. See Legislative Leadership meetings, June 21 and 28, July 6, and December 12, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 1; and Legislative Leadership meeting, January 31, 1956, ibid., box 2. For critical discussions of the federal highway program, especially see Mark H. Rosc, Interst: Express Highway Politics, 1941–1956 (Lawrence, Kans., 1979), 93–100; and Gelfand, A Nation of Cities, 226–30.
controlled by large, private utilities. Here, as in other areas, Eisenhower’s policies thus decisively shaped the political agenda of future generations.

Eisenhower faced greater difficulties in those areas of public policy, such as agriculture and labor, where the power of corporate elites was contested by other powerful interests. He sought to shape agricultural policy with the cooperation of a national advisory commission representing the powerful triad of large commercial farmers, food processors, and land-grant economists who increasingly dominated national agricultural policy. He believed, as did most of the members of this commission, that the role of government in agriculture should be reduced and that price supports in particular should be lowered. Although the reduction of supports would, he believed, necessitate some “readjustment” in farming (“readjustment” was the then current administrative euphemism for recession), the long-term result would be production for demand and an end to costly surpluses. Eisenhower repeatedly defended the frequently unpopular efforts of Ezra Taft Benson to move in this direction, however much he differed from the tactless agriculture secretary on questions of pace, timing, and public relations. But Congressional leaders, less sanguine than Eisenhower about the social costs of “readjustment” and more sensitive to outcries from the farm belt, frustrated the president. He obtained some reduction of price supports in the farm bills of 1954 and 1958, but the government remained pledged, as it had since the 1930s, to an elaborate system of price supports and production controls. Indeed, even though farm income sharply declined and hundreds of thousands of small farmers were forced from the land, production continued to increase and surpluses to pile up in government warehouses. Eisenhower was convinced that, in agriculture as in other areas, the enemies of good policy were demagogic politicians and greedy partisans of self-interest, especially those farm-state leaders who insisted on the retention of high price supports or who declined to accept his version of the corporate commonwealth. By the end of the decade, however, he clearly realized the dimensions of his own failure, was more willing than before to seek compromise with Congressional leaders, and believed, as he put it, that the “application of ... principles is not always easy and simple in a society as complex as ours.”

In the case of labor, Eisenhower’s views and policies were divided. On the one

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hand, he accepted the existence of labor unions as an unavoidable part of the nation's corporate order; on the other, he worried over what he saw as their divisive appeals to class selfishness and greed and over the possibility that the wage settlements they compelled might lead to a ruinous inflation. Nor could he bring himself to accord to labor leaders the same degree of legitimacy he bestowed upon the leaders of business and industry. In his diary he confessed to "disappointment" over his first secretary of labor, plumbers' union president Martin Durkin, who "could never free himself of the feeling that he was placed in the Cabinet to be a trade unionist." He was far more comfortable with Durkin's successor, James P. Mitchell, who had handled personnel and industrial relations for Macy's and Bloomingdale's and whose views and style more closely approximated his own. To his brother Milton he confided that, while his labor policies were designed to appeal to the mass of American workers, "most certainly" his administration was "not consciously seeking the favor of the so-called labor leader." In dealing with labor Eisenhower repeatedly returned to the themes of cooperation and mutuality that had characterized his thinking since at least the late 1940s. "The President," an aide recorded in early 1953, "made an eloquent presentation of the need for cooperation by free men... in order to make Democracy work. He emphasized the need for a cooperative climate rather than rigid specification by law." The foundations of the administration's labor philosophy, concluded Secretary Mitchell, were "cooperation, mutual understanding, self-respect and respect for other viewpoints, restraint and self-discipline."

During the 1952 campaign Eisenhower had promised to seek changes in the Taft-Hartley law, only to be subsequently caught in a bitter struggle between the unions, who hoped to eliminate some of the law's antilabor features, and business leaders, who wanted even more restrictive legislation. He never permitted himself to become too closely identified with Taft-Hartley revision, however, and he quickly abandoned efforts to change the law once it became clear how difficult and politically costly this would be. Four years later, following Senate revelations of corruption in labor unions, he again called for labor legislation. This time, however, he played an extremely active and skillful role in winning passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act, a measure that generally reflected the wishes of corporate lobbyists.

47 Eisenhower Diaries (January 19, 1954), 267; Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, January 6, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; Eisenhower, Conversation with Sinclair Weeks, November 7, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 42; Cabinet meeting, February 20, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 1; and Mitchell, "The Accomplishments of the Department of Labor, 1953–1961," DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 29. Efforts to create a tripartite (labor, business, and administration) advisory committee founded on conflict between business and labor representatives; Legislative Leadership meeting, March 9, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3.

48 On administration attempts to resolve the conflict, see Bernard Shankly and Jerry Morgan, Memorandum for the President, September 20, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 41. On the opposition of business leaders, see Philip D. Reed to Eisenhower, December 23, 1953, ibid.; Lewis W. Douglas to Eisenhower, December 10, 1953, ibid., box 15; Eisenhower to Clarence Francis, December 19, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 2; Memorandum of Conversation with Roy Roberts, December 11, 1953, ibid.; and Cabinet meeting, May 13, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 5.

49 Summary Statement of the President's Proposals... (ca. November 8, 1957), DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 10; and Cabinet meeting, November 8, 1957, ibid. The extraordinary role of the White House is detailed in the minutes of the president's meetings with Congressional leaders. See notes on meetings with legislative leaders, December 4, 1957–September 8, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 3. Also see...
Eisenhower sought, with some success, to limit the direct and formal role of the White House in labor conflict. He invoked Taft-Hartley far less frequently than had Truman, preferring to work indirectly and behind the scenes. When he did invoke the law, moreover, as he did during the long steel strike of 1959, he did so very reluctantly. The weight of White House intervention, more often than not, worked against high wage settlements that might, in the administration’s eyes, prove inflationary. Thus in early 1960 White House leaders congratulated themselves for having achieved a steel settlement that was lower than those obtained in the can and aluminum industries and that, had the rank and file been allowed to vote, would have been rejected by an overwhelming margin. The administration also sought to encourage industry-wide bargaining and the negotiation of long-term contracts, thereby increasing industrial stability. The result, though Eisenhower could scarcely claim full credit, was a remarkable period of industrial tranquility during which, in comparison with the Truman years, there were far fewer strikes, far fewer workers involved, and far fewer workdays lost. Real wages improved somewhat during the decade, and most workers enjoyed a degree of security that stood in sharp contrast to their recollections of the 1930s. Yet these gains were modest, and large numbers of Americans, one-fifth or more of the population, remained in poverty. Thus while labor and the laboring classes became partners in the corporate commonwealth, they remained very junior members at best.

The search for stability and social harmony underlying Eisenhower’s vision of a corporate commonwealth also shaped his style of presidential leadership. This style was quite obviously a product of his experience as a military leader and of his conviction that modern government was so large and complex that no individual could master all of its intricacies. It was clearly reinforced by the practical necessity of working for the most part with a Congress organized by the opposing party. It was also shaped, however, by the conservative and consensual goals of his presidency and by his belief in the limited role of the political state, in the dangers of popular politics, in the importance of persuasion rather than coercion, and in the necessity for voluntary discipline, restraint, and cooperation among America’s powerful economic groupings. Its purpose was to deflect attention not only from himself but also from the national government itself, to deflate and depoliticize

Alan K. McAdams, Power and Politics in Labor Legislation (New York, 1964), 71–74, 272–73: “The distinctive feature of the management side of the labor reform battle was the degree of participation by the White House,” concludes this study of the bill’s passage. “The direct coordination of the management groups by the Administration made possible working relationships which were smoother than had ever been achieved before among usually widely ranging groups.”

expectations raised by two decades of Democratic rule. Thus, he sought to govern by indirection, delegating authority to those he trusted and with whom he was in basic agreement, but insulating himself from the controversy and criticism their actions might provoke. He tried quite deliberately to appear above partisan politics, refused to be drawn into personal confrontations, and almost never displayed in public his legendary temper. To those around him, he repeatedly counseled moderation and restraint. The task of the political leader, he wrote in a long letter to Nelson Rockefeller, was “to devise plans along which humans [can] make constructive progress. This means that the plan or program itself tends to fall in the ‘gray’ category even though an earnest attempt is made to apply the black and white values of moral truths. . . . Perfection is not quickly reached; the plan is therefore ‘gray’ or ‘middle-of-the-road.’” 51

His experience as president also reinforced his distrust of popular democracy. People in the aggregate, he seemed to believe, were all too prone to self-seeking and all too vulnerable to the blandishments of demagogues. Congress was a Warren of greedy special interests (an “occupational hazard,” one aide quipped), while the press was little more than an endless source of “distortion and gross error.” 52 Mistrustful of democracy, he opposed most efforts to modify the nation’s constitutional arrangements. He believed that the Bricker Amendment would undermine the foundations of presidential authority in foreign affairs, and that attempts by Henry Cabot Lodge and others to change the electoral system by introducing proportional voting would make the American system “closer to a democracy, less of a republic.” “We can’t let just a popular majority sweep us in one direction,” he told Vice President Nixon, “because then you can’t recover.” He defended the Supreme Court not because he always agreed with its decisions, but because he believed that “one of the great functions of the Supreme Court was to provide needed stability in a form of government where political expediency might at times carry parties and political leaders to extremes.” 53

Fear of popular politics and a commitment to voluntarism and corporate self-

51 For discussion of Eisenhower’s leadership by those who worked with him, especially see Emmet John Hughes, The Order of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years (New York, 1965), 128–27; and Larson, The President Nobody Knew, 12–33. Also see Parmet, Eisenhower and the American Crusades, 175, 209–10. For the best and most recent appraisal of Eisenhower’s leadership, see Fred I. Greenstein, “Eisenhower as an Activist President,” Political Science Quarterly, 94 (1979–80): 575–99. For Eisenhower’s own reflections on leadership, see especially Eisenhower to Emmet John Hughes, December 10, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 2; Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, October 9, 1953, ibid.; Eisenhower to Rockefeller, May 5, 1969, ibid., box 32; Eisenhower to Henry Luce, August 8, 1960, ibid., box 33; and Eisenhower to William Phillips, June 5, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 25.

52 On the public, see, for example, Eisenhower to Hughes, December 10, 1953; and Eisenhower to Lamar Fleming, Jr., December 5, 1958, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 23. For typical remarks on Congress, see Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, July 29, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 15; and Eisenhower to Arthur Burns, March 11, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 10. The White House aide is quoted in the Whitman Diary, August 11, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 2. On the press, see—again for fairly typical expressions—Eisenhower Diaries (January 19, 1954), 270–72; and Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, January 27, 1954; Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, April 27, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 4; and Eisenhower to Robinson, August 4, 1958, ibid., box 21.

53 On the Bricker Amendment, see Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, December 12, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; Eisenhower to J. Earl Schaeffer, January 22, 1954, ibid.; and Eisenhower to John
government also shaped Eisenhower's preoccupation with public relations: if he hoped to avoid coercive state intervention and to encourage the resolution of conflict among powerful interests, his chief techniques had to be persuasive; and if the principle threat to this process arose from lack of discipline among the masses and the demagogic promises of politicians, then public relations must play an even more important role in encouraging restraint, defusing dangerous issues, dampening protest and legitimizing corporate rule. The administration faced problems "not unlike the advertising and sales activity of a great industrial organization," he noted in 1953; and, while it was necessary to have "a good product to sell," it was also necessary "to have an effective and persuasive way of informing the public of the excellence of that product."54 He established a standing committee on public relations within the White House, followed closely the public relations efforts of the Republican national committee, and maintained a steady correspondence with friends and advisors from the world of corporate public relations. He directed the organization of special campaigns on agriculture, highways, public power, labor relations, and economic policy, and he enlisted the support of powerful private groups such as the Advertising Council in publicizing his policies.55 He was exceptionally skillful in his press relations. He maintained a wide correspondence with many publishers and editors, invited them frequently to his stag dinners, and even employed them on occasion to conduct confidential surveys on his behalf. He was extremely sensitive to adverse comment in the press and frequently sought to counter such criticism, though almost always obliquely.56

J. McCloy, January 19, 1954, ibid. On electoral college reform; see the Whitman Diary, March 20, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 8; and Pre-legislative Leadership meeting, March 20, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 2. On the Supreme Court, see Eisenhower to E. F. Hutton, July 10, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 14. Those changes that Eisenhower did support were almost invariably those that would have strengthened the executive or further insulated political leaders from popular influence: for example, the item veto, the requirement of a two-thirds vote to reject presidential nominations, and four-year terms for Congress; Legislative Leadership meeting, September 9, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 3.

54 Eisenhower to George Humphrey, Arthur Summerfield, Henry Cabot Lodge, Sherman Adams, et al., November 29, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 33. 55 Cabinet meeting, July 3, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 2; Cabinet meeting, March 5, 1954, ibid., box 5; Cabinet meeting, November 5, 1954, ibid., box 4; and Cabinet meeting, July 8, 1955, ibid., box 5. One of the president's sharpest and most frequently proffered criticisms was on the lack of public relations skill among his subordinates. See, for example, Eisenhower to Charles E. Wilson, November 2, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 14; and Eisenhower, Memorandum for the Files, March 12, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 4. For Eisenhower's own concern with public relations, see, among others, Eisenhower to Sigurd S. Larson, February 1, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; Eisenhower to William E. Robinson, August 4, 1954, ibid., box 4; Eisenhower, Memorandum for Robert Montgomery, March 12 and August 18, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 29; and Eisenhower, Memorandum of Appointment [with Sig Larson, of Young & Rubicam, Kenneth Dyke of Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborne, and others], September 2, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 20. For public relations in agriculture, see, for example, Belknap to Secretary of Agriculture, December 9, 1953, DDEL, Benson Papers, Public Relations, roll 27. On the role of public relations in economic policy, see Eisenhower to Raymond Saulnier, February 11, 1958, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 35. On public power, see Sherman Adams, Memorandum for Howard Pyle, June 1, 1955, DDEL, Pyle Records, box 37. On highways, see Whitman Diary, February 12, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 4. On labor relations, see McAdams, Power and Politics in Labor Legislation, 74–75, 120, 178. And, on the Advertising Council, see Griffith, "The Selling of America." 28–47.

56 On Eisenhower's use of newspaper editors in conducting confidential surveys, see Cabinet meeting,
Eisenhower did not, however, limit these efforts, which he frequently referred to as "selling the American people," to advertising his highly marketable personality or even to promoting the specific programs of the administration but directed them as well toward the broader, long-term goals of his presidency—winning popular acceptance of the discipline and self-restraint necessary to the corporate commonwealth and helping "our people understand that they must avoid extremes in reaching solutions to the social, economic and political problems that are constantly with us."57 His approach to these broad aims was nowhere better illustrated than in the creation, near the end of his second term, of a commission to identify and publicize national goals for the 1960s. Chief among these goals, Eisenhower made clear in advance, was the "American aspiration . . . to develop a world in which all peoples will be living at peace under cooperative policies with maximum standards of living and opportunity for all." The most important purpose of the study, he noted privately, "was to outline for the American people problems involved in mobilizing public opinion in a democracy in order to make the hard decisions that would be needed to successfully compete in an indefinite cold war."58

Eisenhower's deep concern for public order and consensus influenced his response to Joseph R. McCarthy and the discordant Cold War politics of anticommunism. While he repeatedly insisted on the importance of justice and fair play, he tended, almost without exception, to resolve conflicts between security and civil liberties in favor of the state. He supported legislation to strip citizenship from those convicted under the Smith Act of conspiring to advocate the violent overthrow of the government, to compel witnesses to testify in national security investigations, to legalize the use of wiretap information in internal security cases.

57 Memorandum Concerning the Commission on National Goals, February 7, 1960, in Eisenhowe Public Papers, 8: 159–69; and Robert Merriam, Memorandum for the Record, March 19, 1959, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 25. For the commission's report, see The American Assembly, Goals for Americans: The Report of the President's Commission on National Goals (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960), 1–31. Not surprisingly, the report reflected the president's own belief in a limited federal state ("Government participation in the economy should be limited to those instances where it is essential to the national interest and where private individuals or organizations cannot adequately meet the need"); in cooperation between business and labor, in a free market for agriculture, in economic growth and modernization, in an "open and peaceful world" characterized by free trade and mutual interdependence, and his conviction that the American people should be summoned to "extraordinary personal responsibility, sustained effort, and sacrifice."
and to broaden and redefine espionage and sabotage laws. One of his earliest actions as president was to institute a drastic new internal security program that broadened the criteria for federal employment to include not only loyalty and security but also "suitability," abolished the hearing and review procedures established by the Truman administration, and extended the power of summary dismissal, previously reserved to heads of sensitive departments such as state and defense, to all federal agencies and departments. He continued the Truman administration's prosecution of Communist leaders under the Smith Act and approved, in outline at least, the FBI's covert and extralegal COINTELPRO efforts "to promote disruption within the ranks of the Communist Party." He was well aware, moreover, of the FBI's euphemistically labeled "custodial detention" program and was prepared to order suspected subversives rounded up in time of national emergency. Although he believed that little new evidence had been produced to implicate J. Robert Oppenheimer and that the case had been "constantly reviewed and reexamined over a number of years," Eisenhower nevertheless quickly ordered the famous physicist's security clearance lifted and later defended the AEC's finding that Oppenheimer was a security risk. And, although he considered commuting the sentences of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, he finally decided, as he wrote his son, that "the exemplary feature of the punishment, the hope that it would deter others, is something that cannot be ignored."

Although Eisenhower had himself on occasion employed the communist issue for political purposes, he nevertheless loathed McCarthy and was sharply critical of the highly publicized investigations in Congress. What he objected to most strenuously in the Congressional proceedings, however, was not so much their arbitrary violation of individual liberties but rather the disorderly and partisan atmosphere in which they were conducted. The job of routing subversives, he believed, was primarily administrative, not legislative—a task for orderly and bureaucratic resolution, not partisan debate. His strongest and most direct stand against the Congressional inquisitors came in the spring of 1954, when he invoked the doctrine of executive privilege in order to protect the privacy of advice offered within the executive branch. He bluntly told Congressional leaders, "Any man who testified as to the advice he gave me won't be working for me that night... I will

59 Athan Theoharis, Spying on Americans: Political Surveillance from Hoover to the Houston Plan (Philadelphia, 1978), 54, 55, 82-83, 107-10, 155-65, 299-18; and Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964, 1656-60. The president's program, boasted Walter Bedell Smith, would have the effect of outlawing the Communist party "without becoming involved in the constitutional complications of actual outlawry." Cabinet meeting, April 2, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 2. On rounding up political subversives, see Whitman Diary, June 25, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 2.

60 On Oppenheimer, see Eisenhower Diaries (December 2, 3, 1953), 259-60; and Hagerty Diary, May 29, June 1, 10, 1954, DDEL, Hagerty Papers, box 1. The strongest evidence against Oppenheimer, in Eisenhower's view, was the fact that he continued, through 1953, to visit socially with Haakon Chevalier, long after the 1943 "kitchen conversation" in which Chevalier had initiated a discussion about supplying technical information to the Soviet Union; Whitman Diary, June 25, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 2. On the Rosenberg case, see Eisenhower to John S. D. Eisenhower, June 16, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 2; and Eisenhower to Clyde Miller, June 10, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 35. Eisenhower was impressed by trial judge Irving R. Kaufman and subsequently sought to elevate him to the U.S. Court of Appeals; Eisenhower, Telephone conversation with Herbert Brownell, February 22, 1955, January 27, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, boxes 5, 12.
not allow people around me to be subpoenaed and you might just as well know it now."61

He refused to be drawn into a direct confrontation with McCarthy, however, despite repeated entreaties from friends and advisors who feared that the senator's continued depredations would undermine the president's leadership. This reluctance arose in part from his realistic, if cynical, respect for McCarthy's support among Senate Republicans, in part from his personal dislike for the philippic mode. It also derived, however, from his sophisticated analysis of the relationships between McCarthy, the media, and the presidency. McCarthy, he wrote, owed "his entire prominence and influence . . . to the publicity media of the nation." The president, on the other hand, also possessed a "terrific headline value." He noted to his friend Hazlett that, "whenever the President takes part in a newspaper trial of some individual of whom he disapproves, one thing is automatically accomplished. This is an increase in the headline value of the individual attacked."62 He chose instead to combat McCarthy through indirect action: he urged Republican senators to attack him, ordered a reluctant Richard M. Nixon into combat in order to prevent McCarthy from monopolizing network television, encouraged Paul Hoffman and others to organize an anti-McCarthy movement, prevented McCarthy from addressing party gatherings, and suggested, with great circumspection, that publishers and media executives resist the senator's demands for time and space. He even suggested—only half jokingly—that since McCarthy had been built up by the press, the press should "develop a collusion to ignore him."63 In the end, of course, the Senate did act, however reluctantly, in censuring the senator from Wisconsin. Eisenhower remained publicly aloof from the controversy, the press began to ignore McCarthy, and a measure of tranquility returned to American politics. By his own terms, if not by those of liberals or civil libertarians, the president had succeeded in bringing an era to an end.

The sharpest challenge to Eisenhower's quest for consensus, however, and the one that revealed most clearly the class and racial bias of his ideology, was the struggle by black Americans for civil rights and economic justice. Like most men of power, Eisenhower fully subscribed to the hierarchical values of corporate America. Though he believed in the principle of equality of opportunity, he also subscribed

61 Eisenhower to Charles E. Wilson, May 17, 1954, in Eisenhower Public Papers, 2: 438-44. "I've gone to utmost lengths to be cooperative with Congress," Eisenhower told Republican majority leader William Knowland. "I have declined to get into this mess even when I have been needled by the press, but this is one thing I will fight with all my power—I will not have my men subpoenaed." Hagerty Diary, May 17, 1954, DDEL, Hagerty Papers, box 1.
62 Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, July 21, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 2; Eisenhower to William E. Robinson, March 23, 1954, ibid., box 3; Eisenhower to John Reagan McCravy, Jr., December 1, 1954, ibid., box 4; Eisenhower to Philip D. Reed, June 17, 1953, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 32; and Eisenhower to Paul H. Helms, March 9, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 18.
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to its less frequently stated corollary—that such opportunity inevitably created
equality of condition. He shared many of the conventional prejudices common
among upper-middle class white Americans toward blacks and other minorities. He
believed in equality before the law but not in “social equality.” He did not think, he
told Arthur Larson, that everyone had to mingle socially “or that a Negro should
court my daughter.” These attitudes shaped his response to the emerging racial
crisis of the 1950s and reinforced the fundamentally conservative elements of his
political philosophy: his narrow construction of what was permissible and desirable
for the national government to do, his fear of popular passion and his distrust of
politics, his preference for cooperation over coercion, and his tendency to insulate
the presidency from controversial issues. As president, he opposed the establish-
ment of a Federal Fair Employment Practices Commission as well as any efforts that
might project the national government any deeper into the school desegregation
controversy opened up by the Brown decision in 1954. Not until 1956 did he call
for civil rights legislation, and then only at the insistence of Attorney General
Brownell. His support was limited, moreover, to the area of voting rights, where
federal responsibility seemed clear, and to the creation of a bipartisan commission
to study the problem. The proposed legislation, he assured Senate Majority Leader
Lyndon B. Johnson, represented “the mildest civil rights bill possible”; even so,
the measure was drastically weakened before enactment in 1957. Three years later,
prodded by his own Civil Rights Commission, he again called for legislation, this
time an extremely modest proposal that became the Civil Rights Act of 1960.

In civil rights, as in other areas, he preferred to act administratively, without
widespread publicity, and where federal jurisdiction was uncontested—for example,
in the desegregation of navy yards and the integration of public facilities in the
District of Columbia. He also sought, privately, to persuade prominent Southerners

mount a public and press relations campaign aimed at “replacing, in the public mind, the disuniting symbol
of McCarthyism with the unifying image of the President as the effective instrument of anti-subversion”;
Hoffman to Eisenhower, April 20, 1954, HSTL, Hoffman Papers, box 27. On Eisenhower’s efforts to
influence the press, see William S. Paley to Eisenhower, May 22, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 25;
Eisenhower to Gabriel Hauge, September 30, 1954, DDEL, EPP, DF Diaries series, box 4; Whitman Diary,
April 27, 1954, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 2; William E. Robinson to Eisenhower, July 22,
1953, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 29; and Eisenhower to Robinson, July 27, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE
Diaries series, box 3. Many of the liberal businessmen who had supported Eisenhower in 1952 were
extremely critical of McCarthy; for example, Harry A. Bulis, Philip D. Reed, and Paul H. Helms. It is
especially interesting to note that among the most important contributors to McCarthy’s downfall were
three of the founders of the Committee for Economic Development—Democratic Senator William Benton,
Republican Senator Ralph Flanders, and Hoffman.

64 Larson, The President Nobody Knew, 124–33; and Lyon, Eisenhower: Portrait of the Hero, 556–57. “Maybe
the President might get a chuckle out of this,” observed his close friend Robinson, enunciating a racial joke;

65 On the 1957 law, especially see Legislative Leadership meetings, April 17, 1956, July 9–August 27,
1957, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 2; Cabinet meeting, March 9, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series,
box 6; Cabinet meeting, March 23, 1956, ibid., box 7; Cabinet meeting, August 2, 1957, ibid., box 9; and
Eisenhower, Telephone conversation with Lyndon B. Johnson, June 15, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries
series, box 14. For Eisenhower’s misgivings, see Gerald D. Morgan, Memorandum for the Record, March
24, 1956, ibid., box A. On the 1960 law, see Legislative Leadership meetings, February 2, April 26, 1960,
DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 3. For a chronology of civil rights legislation, see Congress and the Nation,
1945–1964, 1621–30. For an excellent legislative history of the Eisenhower program, see Steven F. Lawson,
to embrace his own goals of moderation and gradual progress.\(^\text{66}\) He feared the passions aroused by civil rights, both among blacks and Southern whites, and repeatedly preached patience, calmness, and forbearance. As he told Booker T. Washington's daughter, "I like to feel that where we have to change the hearts of men, we cannot do it by cold lawmaking, but must make these changes by appealing to reason, by prayer, and by constantly working at it through our own efforts."\(^\text{67}\) He insisted, moreover, on insulating himself from the actions of the Supreme Court, the Civil Rights Commission, and even his own attorney general. Thus, in the school desegregation cases he carefully avoided identification with Attorney General Brownell, whose *amicus curiae* brief had drawn sharp criticism from Southern conservatives. He repeatedly refused to endorse the Brown decision or to identify himself publicly with the goal of desegregation. Privately, he thought the decision a mistake that would set back racial progress throughout the South. Desegregation, he believed, would require over thirty to forty years to complete.\(^\text{68}\) When efforts at conciliation failed and he was compelled, however reluctantly, to dispatch federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, he carefully couched his actions in terms of defending civil order, not civil rights. As he explained to his friend Hazlett, "My biggest problem has been to make people see . . . that my main interest is not in the integration or segregation question. My opinion as to the wisdom or timeliness of the Supreme Court's decision has nothing to do with the case. . . . If the day comes when we can obey the orders of our Courts only when we personally approve of them, the end of the American system . . . will not be far off." In civil rights, as in other areas, a concern for order and stability predominated; and it was the president's firm intention, as he told South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes, "to make haste slowly."\(^\text{69}\)

**Eisenhower's Quest for a Corporate Commonwealth**

At home was paralleled and inextricably bound to the struggle to create, at least among the so-called free nations, an interdependent and cooperative world order. Like other American leaders he believed that freedom, security, and prosperity were indivisible and that little domestic progress was possible in the absence of an international "atmosphere

\(^{66}\) Larson, *The President Nobody Knew*, 124–33; Staff meeting, April 9, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 2; Eisenhower, Speech to the NAACP, March 10, 1954, in Eisenhower Public Papers, 2: 310; Eisenhower to James F. Byrnes, August 14, 1953, December 1, 1953, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 3; Eisenhower to Billy Graham, March 22, 1956, ibid., box 8; Eisenhower to Ralph McGill, November 4, 1957, ibid., box 17; Eisenhower to B. C. Warren, March 30, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 16, and Eisenhower to C. C. Warren, March 30, 1956, DDEL, White House Central Files, O.F. 141-B-1, box 730.

\(^{67}\) E. Frederick Morton, *Black Man in the White House: A Diary of the Administrative Years* (New York, 1963), 98.


\(^{69}\) Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, November 8, 1957, DDEL, EPP, Name series, box 18; and Eisenhower to Byrnes, July 25, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 14.
in which America can be safe and prosperous.” The challenge to such a system, he believed, was threefold: most obviously from the Soviet Union and other Communist nations but also from the Western nations, which might unthinkingly allow the world to fall victim to communism because each was “too preoccupied with its own local and selfish interests,” and from within the United States itself, where greedy pressure groups might undermine long-run national and international interests. If, on the one hand, a disorderly and dangerous world could disrupt America’s future progress and prosperity, so, on the other hand, greed and shortsightedness at home could undermine American goals abroad. The purpose of foreign policy therefore lay in the mastery of these contradictions. This meant, to begin with, convincing Western nations that their (and America’s) long-run interests demanded cooperation and mutual restraint. Too often, he believed, such cooperation was sacrificed to what he considered parochial interests and loyalties: the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the Indian-Pakistani struggle over Kashmir, Korean antagonism toward Japan, and the unwillingness of European colonial powers to yield their prewar empires, to cite some of the examples he most frequently used in his private correspondence.

Sound foreign policy and broad, long-term national interests also meant that it was often necessary to restrain domestic interests. Expanded international trade, for example, which he considered absolutely vital to American and world prosperity, demanded a willingness to lower barriers to foreign imports, even at the expense of domestic producers; and nothing so irritated him as the clamor of businessmen for protection. “Daily I am impressed by the short-sightedness bordering upon tragic stupidity of many who fancy themselves to be the greatest believers in and supporters of capitalism . . . but who blindly support measures and conditions that cannot fail in the long run to destroy any free economic system,” he angrily wrote in his diary. Many businessmen, he complained, were “so concerned for their own particular immediate market and prosperity that they utterly fail to see that the United States cannot continue to live in a world where it must, for the disposal of its products, export vast portions of its industrial and agricultural products unless it also imports a sufficiently great amount of foreign products to allow countries to pay for the surpluses they receive from us.” Similarly, Americans had to be willing to bear the costs of collective security, if for no other reason than to avoid what he believed would be the far greater costs of military and economic isolation. To his friend Hazlett he wrote that “we must pursue a broad and intelligent program of loans, trade, technical assistance and, under current conditions, mutual guarantees of security. We must stop talking about ‘give aways.’ We must understand that our foreign expenditures are investments in America’s future.” He gave what he called a “simple example: No other nation is exhausting its irreplaceable resources so rapidly as is ours. Unless we are careful to build up and maintain a great group of international friends ready to trade with us, where do we hope to get all the

70 Eisenhower to C. D. Jackson, April 30, 1957, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 13; Eisenhower to Frank Altschul, October 28, 1957, ibid., box 16; and Eisenhower Diaries (February 9, July 2, 1953), 228–30, 242–45.
71 Eisenhower Diaries (July 2, 24, 1953), 242–49.
materials that we will one day need as our rate of consumption continues and accelerates." He bluntly told a group of prominent businessmen at a White House dinner that "we cannot have prosperity without security and we must have friends with whom to trade."72

Eisenhower shared the conservative, anticommmunist premises that animated both earlier and subsequent administrations, and he could act with ruthless efficiency when he believed that risks were limited and important national interests at stake. In Iran, where he had directed the overthrow of Muhammad Mossadeq and the return of young Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, he believed that "we were in imminent danger of losing Iran, and sixty percent of the known oil reserves of the world," and he boasted privately that through his actions "that threat had been largely, if not totally, removed." In Guatemala, he ordered a highly secret CIA operation that overturned the moderately leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and replaced it with the reactionary, but pro-American, dictatorship of Carlos Castillo Armas. In the Far East he was even willing to threaten nuclear war, especially against the Chinese, who had no capacity to retaliate in kind.73 Yet for the most part his conduct of foreign affairs was distinguished by restraint, especially when the risks seemed high and the dangers of miscalculation great—he understood that the refusal to act was often the wisest course of action. As Robert Divine recently concluded, "Almost all of Eisenhower's foreign policy achievements were negative in nature. He ended the Korean war, he refused to intervene militarily in Indochina, he refrained from involving the United States in the Suez crisis, he avoided war with China over Quemoy and Matsu, he resisted the temptation to force a showdown over Berlin, he stopped exploding nuclear weapons in the atmosphere."74

Yet Eisenhower could never quite transcend the logic of his premises, as his response to revolutionary nationalism clearly revealed. Like many sophisticated conservatives, he opposed traditional European colonialism as costly, impractical, and ultimately self-defeating. From his experience in the Philippines, moreover, he knew firsthand of "the intensity and force of the spirit of nationalism that is gripping all peoples of the world today." He believed, as he wrote George Humphrey, that the "protection of our own interests and our own system demands . . . that we . . . understand that the spirit of nationalism, coupled with a deep hunger for some betterment in physical conditions and living standards, creates a critical situation in the under-developed areas of the world."75 He had at

72 Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, August 3, 1956, DDEL, EPP, DDE Diaries series, box 8; and Harlow, Memorandum for the Record, January 30, 1958, ibid., box 18. For a critical examination of economic diplomacy under Eisenhower, see Burton I. Kaufman, Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953–1961 (Baltimore, 1982).
74 Divine, Eisenhower and the Cold War, 134.
75 Eisenhower to George Humphrey, March 1957, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 25; Eisenhower-
first believed that the free flow of goods and capital would in itself sustain economic development and that cooperation among nations and a friendly door to private investment would promote growth throughout the world. He later came to believe that enlightened self-interest required that the operation of the international market be supplemented by public capital. He expected, however, that new nations would follow the American model of capitalist growth. Self-determination did not include the right to choose a radical road to development. Nor could he ever disentangle his response to social revolutions from his reaction to the foreign and military policies of the Soviet Union and China, as in the case of Indochina. If Eisenhower displayed restraint by refusing to intervene on behalf of the French in Indochina, it was a restraint produced more by France’s refusal to grant its colonies full independence and permit the United States a decisive role in the military conduct of the war than by any particular reluctance on Eisenhower’s part to employ force against social revolutions. The president wrote Hazlett in October 1954 that he had been unable to obtain “the conditions under which I felt the United States could properly intervene to protect its own interests.” Eisenhower was determined, moreover, to draw the line in Southeast Asia—“we have got to keep the Pacific an American lake,” he told his advisors. Following the French collapse he committed the United States to the support of a client state south of the seventeenth parallel and to the undermining of the agreements reached at Geneva in 1954. These actions, as much as any, led to the expanded American involvement in Vietnam in the decade that followed.

Nor, finally, could Eisenhower escape the costly and destructive momentum of the warfare state. He believed that the Soviet challenge to the United States was indefinite, not immediate, and that it posed an economic and political threat as well as a military one. He was convinced that high levels of defense spending, such as those that had accompanied World War II and Korea, could not be indefinitely sustained without producing economic disorder and a resort to pervasive state intervention. As president he sought to reduce the level of America’s defense effort, the so-called New Look, and was willing to permit by the end of the decade a relative increase in Soviet power. He embraced the concept of deterrent sufficiency rather than superiority—“why have more when we have as much destructive power as we do now?” he asked Congressional leaders. Although he understood the problems posed by limited wars—“the enemy’s political and military nibbling,” he called it in a letter to Winston Churchill—he remained reluctant to “deploy and tie down our forces around the Soviet periphery in small wars.” His efforts to hold
down military spending drew sharp criticism from within the armed services and Congress, however, and during his second administration the struggle to maintain what he believed was an appropriate balance between the nation's military and economic requirements consumed much of his energy.

The battle to hold down defense spending also forced Eisenhower to confront some of the dilemmas raised by his reliance on partnership and professionalism. He had deliberately chosen an industrialist to head the defense department—"We have earlier tried two investment bankers, a lawyer and a soldier," he observed—in the hope of imposing discipline and order on the services and strengthening cooperative relations with business. Many of his other defense appointments were also drawn from industry and finance, and the industrial advisory system begun during earlier administrations was expanded and strengthened. Similarly, Eisenhower hoped to recruit disinterested and expert military advisors, especially for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who could rise above the petty loyalties of the services and, together with the civilian leadership, help promote broad national goals. He was, in all of this, disappointed. Wilson and the other businessmen who staffed defense failed to impose order, and, although Eisenhower succeeded in reorganizing the department in 1958, he increasingly came to believe that its problems were systemic. Service rivalry continued almost unabated, with each branch seeming to believe that it was "exclusively responsible for the defense of the United States." The Joint Chiefs of Staff failed to provide "disinterested, competent advice," and instead in many instances they became special pleaders for their services. Most importantly, Eisenhower came to believe that defense contractors themselves were exercising far too much influence over military budgets, and he expressed a keen interest in John J. McCloy's observation that "the inter-service game extends right down through the corporations, depending upon which branch their contracts flow from and it even goes into the academic institutions depending from where their research grants flow." In his farewell address Eisenhower noted the "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry" and warned against "the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military industrial complex."79

The Eisenhower Presidency was thus shaped by the self-conscious quest for a corporate commonwealth in which the contradictions of modern capitalism would

Eisenhower to Frank Altschul, October 25, 1957. On the concept of sufficiency, see Eisenhower's remarks, Legislative Leadership meeting, March 1, 1955, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 1; Legislative Leadership meetings, February 28, 1956, June 24, 1958, December 15, 1958, ibid., box 2. On limited wars, see Eisenhower to Churchill, January 25, 1955; Andrew J. Goodpaster, Memorandum for the Record, May 23, 1956, DDEL, EPP, DDE, Diaries series, box 8; and Cabinet meeting, May 23, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 11. Also see Douglas Kimard, President Eisenhower and Strategy Management (Lexington, Ky., 1977).

79 Eisenhower to Alfred M. Gruenther, November 26, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Administration series, box 10; Eisenhower to McCloy, May 10, 1958, DDEL, EPP, DDE, Diaries series, box 20; Andrew J. Goodpaster, Memorandum for the Record, May 18, 1956, ibid., box 8; Eisenhower to Everett Hazlett, August 20, 1956, ibid.; Legislative Leadership meeting, June 2, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 3; Notes on Press Conference Briefing, June 3, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 10; and Eisenhower Public Papers, 8: 1058.
be resolved through cooperation, self-restraint, discipline, and disinterested public service. The power of the state would be carefully limited, budgets prudently managed, cooperative arrangements forged between business and government, and conflicts defused through skillful governance and public relations. Enlightened diplomacy would similarly resolve potential conflicts among both developed and developing states and ensure a stable and harmonious world order. Only by understanding the centrality of this quest can we begin to grasp the inner coherence of the Eisenhower presidency and, more importantly, its relationship to the twentieth-century search for a new political economy. Indeed, the struggle to define the character of that new system has been the most important issue in modern American politics, from Populism and Progressivism through Hoover and the New Deal to the contemporary debate over “reindustrialization” and the proper relationship between government and economic life. In understanding Eisenhower we begin to understand our past, our present, and—at least in part—the alternatives before us. It is precisely because of this resonance, however, that we must be careful to avoid facile and misleading analogies and to label any conclusions provisional.

Eisenhower’s quest for a new order was, on one level at least, an enormous success. The years of his presidency were among the most prosperous, peaceful, and politically tranquil in this century, and he left office one of the most popular chief executives in American history. But this was, as he himself would have been quick to note, a calculus of only short-term results. He had succeeded in slowing the growth of the federal state and, as in the case of the highway program, insulating its operations from popular politics. He had also succeeded in expanding cooperative arrangements between government and business and in accelerating the interpenetration of public and private sectors. In all of this, of course, his presidency served to rationalize the efforts of American business to refashion the New Deal state. But he did not succeed in securing that concert of private interests that would insure stable and orderly growth and on which his vision of a corporate commonwealth depended. Indeed, before his presidency had ended there was already widespread evidence of disorder and dysfunction: business leaders had repeatedly failed to exercise the restraint and self-discipline that such a system demanded, the problems of agriculture had proven politically irresolvable, and employers and labor unions were increasingly “tending to settle their differences without regard to the impact on the economy.” Nor did he succeed in surmounting the tensions of class, race, and sex that surged like powerful undercurrents just beneath the surface of American culture. The tendency, encouraged during his presidency, to substitute private consumption for public politics laid a heavy—if then still invisible—tax on limited resources, increased political alienation, and undercut his own emphasis on sacrifice and discipline. Revolutions throughout the Third World created growing international tension and heightened the conflict between his tactical emphasis on the limits of American power and the globalism to which he and other American leaders continued to subscribe. Critics, including some former supporters, now began to accuse the president of lack of leadership, demanding not only a more activist foreign policy but also a level of military spending that he clearly feared
would produce disastrous consequences. By 1958 he was wondering plaintively "whether immediate greed would ever surrender to the long-term good of the whole world." His attempt to fashion a corporate commonwealth foundered, finally, on the problem of succession and on the inability of the Republican party to generate a disinterested leadership capable of sustaining his vision. His deep ambivalence over Nixon turned on precisely this point—"it is terrible," he pointedly told Ann Whitman, "when people get politically ambitious."

Within a decade the fragile consensus of the 1950s shattered on the hard realities of war and revolution, of class and racial conflict, of repression and indulgence. Such a failure was probably inevitable; for despite his pragmatism and lucid intelligence Eisenhower was at heart a visionary. Alarmed by the self-interested destructiveness of contemporary economic life, he had fashioned a deeply conservative image of a good society in which conflict would yield to cooperation, greed to discipline, coercion to self-government. Such a vision was no match for the vast and powerful forces of modern America.

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80 Cabinet meeting, December 14, 1956, DDEL, EPP, Cabinet series, box 6; Legislative Leadership meeting, May 13, 1958, DDEL, EPP, Legislative series, box 2; and Whitman Diary, June 11, 1959, DDEL, EPP, Ann Whitman Diary series, box 10.