The Conversational Frame in Public Address

Robert James Branham and W. Barnett Pearce

Conversationism has been hailed as the hallmark of modern eloquence, yet its political and ethical implications have received little attention. This essay explores the diverse forms and motives of the conversational frame in public address. By framing their remarks and transactions with their listeners as conversational, orators may attempt to reconstruct or seem to reconstruct speaker-audience relationships and to position themselves and their audiences within networks of reciprocal rights and obligations.

KEY CONCEPTS: Conversation; audience; Wiesel, Elie; Reagan, Ronald; Bitburg; Carmichael, Stokely; style

ROBERT JAMES BRANHAM (Ph.D., University of Massachusetts, 1980) is Professor of Rhetoric at Bates College, Lewiston, ME 04240. W. BARNETT PEARCE (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1969) is Professor in the Department of Communication, Loyola University, Chicago, IL 60611. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the March 1993 Temple University Discourse Conference, Philadelphia, PA.

Every premeditated communicative act presupposes an explicit or implicit model of communication and any such model suggests relations of power and purpose that are neither ethically nor politically neutral. At its most fundamental level, a public address is "about" the nature of the relationships constructed among its participants. "The actual reality of language-speech," writes Volosinov, is "the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances." The nature of these events and interactions is not fixed, but volatile. Speakers not only respond to preexisting "situations" and relationships between themselves and their audiences, but frequently engage in rhetorical action designed to reconstruct these situations and relationships. Shaping an audience's understanding of the rhetorical situation and of the relationship between speaker and audience are persuasive ends in themselves, and also instrumental to the accomplishment of other ends.

Different styles of speaking suggest, as well as adapt to, different modes of interaction and relationship. Rhetoric, Thomas Farrell argues, is characteristically "monologic, partisan, and directed toward the attention of others, who then judge its quality," while conversation is "dialogic, bipartisan, and directed only to those in the immediate encounter who may appreciate, but never grasp the holistic form itself." To speak "rhetorically" or "conversationally" is to invoke understandings of the interpersonal relationships and circumstances in which one would speak in this way. We alter our ways of speaking when faced with different audiences, circumstances or objectives. We generally do not employ the same language or strategies to address unknown listeners in public settings as we do in speaking with friends and confidants, for example. But sometimes conversationalists speak oratorically and orators often adopt stylistic attributes normally associated with conversation.

Precisely because different relationships between individuals may be marked by differences in the ways in which they speak to each other, conversational or oratorical forms of talk may be strategically employed to suggest or enact the alteration of relationships between speaker and audience. The seemingly "organic, inseparable link between style and genre" described by Bakhtin may be altered as speakers in one arena of human activity and relationship mimic the generic styles recognizable
appropriate to another. Thus, orators may deliberately and strategically frame their interactions and relationships with their audiences as "conversational."

The concept of "frame" has been used to account for the ways in which people make sense of a situation and to suggest that the meaning of a message depends on the context in which it occurs. Bateson, for example, describes how the frame "this is play" changes the meaning of what otherwise would be taken as a threat or attack. The rhetorical perspective couples the notion of frame to the agency of the speaker in creating the context in which his or her words will be heard. In this sense, "framing" is an activity in which speakers engage with greater or lesser degrees of conscious design. They "frame" their remarks by locating them in particular patterns of relationships between speaker and audience or in specific understandings of the "place" in which they occur. Both interpersonal and public forms of speech are used to constitute or reconstitute interpersonal relationships and individual identities.

The "conversational style" in public address is best understood as a rhetorical choice, designed to frame and thereby (re)construct the apparent relationship between speaker and audience. Rhetors may reasonably decide that framing their interactions with audiences as conversational offers the best chance for accomplishing their persuasive aims. The resulting transactions may not be "true" conversation, in the sense described by Farrell and others. They may be neither dialogical nor bipartisan, for example. Yet the rhetor may frame his or her remarks to suggest the presence of these qualities or the will to achieve them.

This essay is less concerned with the elements of the conversational style than with the strikingly different rhetorical forms, purposes and implications of the relational frame constructed by its use. The construction of a conversational frame in public address is more than "just" a stylistic preference for a less formal manner of delivery and linguistic register. The construction of oratory as conversation can be seen as a way of positioning the speaker, audience and observers not identified as conversational partners within a web of reciprocal rights, duties and obligations. Understood in this manner, the construction of a conversational frame is a powerful rhetorical strategy used for complex and diverse purposes. We believe that it is both possible and useful to distinguish among the ways in which orators frame their remarks and relationships with audiences as "conversational."

Perhaps the most important variable in the orator's use of the conversational frame is inclusiveness. With whom does the orator purport to engage in conversation and who is excluded from this discursive relationship? "How wide," as David Hollinger asks, "is the circle of the 'we'?" We examine three stages of a continuum of inclusivity in the conversational frame: (1) the embrace of all of one's immediate listeners as presumed partners in conversation; (2) the conversational embrace of some listeners as intimates while others are pointedly excluded or addressed in different terms; and (3) the framing of a public address in which none of one's ostensible listeners is addressed conversationally, but instead the audience is enlisted to witness a public "conversation" with another individual. In all three patterns, the construction of a conversational frame in public address is a rhetorical choice through which the speaker seeks to assign or disperse power and responsibility, and to reconstitute the relationship between speaker and audience.

**Inclusive Conversation**

Modern eloquence has been described as conversational, rather than oratorical, in style. In his 1926 guide to Public Speaking, Dale Carnegie identified the shift in popular taste that would guide his successful franchises in speech instruction. "The modern audience," he observed, "wants the speaker to talk just as directly as he [sic] would in a chat, and in the same general manner that he would employ in speaking to one of them in conversation." University instructors of public speaking by 1930 were reported to be "unanimous in urging that the proper mode for speakers in our day is the conversational as against the elocutionary or the formally oratorical style." The authors of popular contemporary textbooks for undergraduate courses in public speaking continue to embrace this dictum. Verderber advises students to adopt a style that it is "the convivial" to hear the "conversational man" listeners" in their evaluations.

The conversational style of the intimacy, engaging speakers are encouraged to individual listeners and conversational interaction produce genuine conversational settings and relationships. Speakers convert the conversational frame for the "of the people," united in conceiving it broadly inclusive.

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advises students to adopt a "speech delivery that sounds like conversation" to the audience. Lucas tells
students that it is "the conversational quality audiences look for in speech delivery." Sprout describes
the "conversational manner" as "the ideal delivery," because it "produces the best responses from
listeners" in their evaluations of a speaker's sincerity, personality, and competence.

The conversational style described by these authors incorporates physical and verbal signification
of the intimacy, engagement, and identification associated with interpersonal interaction. Budding
speakers are encouraged to speak directly about themselves and their audiences, make eye contact with
individual listeners and employ informal language, for example, all traditionally markers of
conversational interaction rather than formal oratory. Yet the adoption of such attributes does not
produce genuine conversation, but rather an intimation of intimacy, an allusion to conversational
settings and relationships.

Speakers conventionally employ the conversational style to assist in the construction of a
conversational frame for their interaction and relationship with an audience, to show themselves to be
"of the people," united in understanding, values and purpose. The conversational relationship thus
conceived is broadly inclusive, presumably directed at all listeners.

Carnegie's anointment of inclusive conversationalism as the ideal form of public address capped
a process of transition in oratorical styles begun decades earlier. Twentieth century "conversational"
elocution, as Kathleen Hall Jamieson has described it, differs in intensity, style, tone and length from
prevailing patterns of late nineteenth century oratory, which themselves represent a shift toward
conversationalism from previously favored styles.

Although it is impossible to identify the precise
origins of the inclusive conversational style, it is clear that by the late nineteenth century, many
popular American orators and lecturers consciously contrived to make their addresses seem
conversational: to conceal their preparation and strategic designs and to appear to be engaged in direct
communication with the immediate listeners. Yet, in fact, the adoption of the conversational frame for
their remarks was a deliberate rhetorical choice, designed to construct particular understandings of the
orator and situation in order to best advance some persuasive purpose. The conversational frame was
constructed, in large part, through the incorporation of rehearsed stylistic attributes associated with
conversational discourse. Mark Twain, for example, delivered hundreds of lectures and after-dinner
speeches in a style understood by his listeners to be quite different from traditional oratory. According
to Paul Fatout:

His way of speaking, whether on the lecture platform or in the banquet hall, was so
nonchalant, so remote from stylized elocution or resounding oratory that audiences
believed he spoke extemporaneously. As if taking part in a living room conversation, he
drewled lazy along like a clever improvisor inventing a monologue on the spur of
the moment. Lounging casually if there was something to lean on, he seldom moved, used
few gestures, and maintained a solemn countenance that was almost severe.

Despite their pretensions, Twain's speeches were not delivered extemporaneously, but carefully
written; his performances were actually repeated unless publicity from one talk alerted later audiences
to its gags. Twain's calculated informality complemented his irreverent opinions and gathered the
audience as intimates in wry observation.

Booker T. Washington similarly eschewed the elocutionary methods, evident preparations and
erudite language of other popular African American speakers of the late nineteenth century in favor of
what Roy Hill has termed "a direct, lively conversational mode." Washington's rhetorical appeals to
Black Americans were rooted in an identification with his own struggles and triumphs. The story of
his climb Up From Slavery (as his autobiography was titled) lent power to his appeals for self-help and
Washington's conversational style suggested his continuing identification with listeners. Through his
use of colloquialisms, apparent engagement with his subject and audience, and seeming independence
from the prepared text, Washington framed his remarks and relationship with his listeners as

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conversational. Hill observes that Washington, like Twain, "gave his speeches an appearance of spontaneity, though he prepared meticulously for each speaking situation."

Other popular lecturers made no pretense of spontaneous composition, yet invoked a conversational frame for their remarks through "non-oratorical" delivery and explicit reference to their audiences. When Henry James returned to his native land in 1905 after twenty years in Europe, he embarked upon a cross-country lecture tour. Celebrated both as a novelist and an arbiter of literary taste, James selected as the topic of his stock lecture, "The Lesson of Balzac." Audiences and reporters who attended James' lectures were amazed by his then-unusual style of delivery. James read from a prepared manuscript, slowly turning the thick pages. Reviewers applauded his even tone and absence of gestures, a style of "conversational reading" that biographer Leon Edel has described as "reading with a total absence of oratorical effect."

More striking still was James' textual approach to his audience. "I have found it necessary, at the eleven hour," he explains at the outset of his speech, "to sacrifice to the terrible question of time a very beautiful and majestic approach that I had prepared to the subject on which I have the honor of addressing you." James invites his audience not to linger on the "pillared portico, paved with marble," but instead to "pass straight into the house and bear with me there as if I had already succeeded in beginning to interest you." James asks his audience to join him in the critical enterprise and together to explore the writings of Balzac as works that invite and stimulate criticism. "No audience in America," Edel speculates, "had ever been so ingratiatingly approached; the tone was confidential; the suave assumption was that the listeners were the speaker's peers, and that they all had deep and intimate matters to deal with."

Twain, Washington and James crafted speaking styles that, although different in many respects, framed their remarks and interactions with the audience as conversational. For these speakers, the appearance of "naturalism," openness and ease were in fact the products of careful preparation, deliberate stylistic choices that belied their artifice. Washington's studied spontaneity and James' "formal informality" were contrived and strategic.

For Washington and James, the adoption of a conversational frame for their remarks was not only a means by which to engage their audiences' interest, but a strategic response to the demands of their rhetorical situations. "Style," writes Susan Sontag, is the "principle of decision" in a text, the "signature of the artist's will." For Washington's message of self-reliance and self-improvement and James' encouragement of reader participation and criticism, the conversational frame was selected as most appropriate for their rhetorical objectives. More hierarchical forms of public address would work at odds with these messages, paradoxically encouraging deference to speakerly authority. Given their aims, Washington and James constructed their remarks to be understood as an embrace of their listeners, an invitation to engage in common enterprise.

The paradox of such ostensibly de-hierarchizing rhetoric lies in the undiminished or even enhanced eminence of the rhetor who have popularized it. "Language is always on the side of power," Barthes cautions, despite efforts by speakers to "speak badly" and diminish their speakerly authority, "to speak is to exercise a will to power: in the space of speech, no innocence, no safety." The broadly inclusive conversational frame, with all its intimations of intimacy and identification, generally conceals and reinforces power. Because their relations with their audiences are not truly dialogical or egalitarian, the conversational frame serves to obscure, rather than to dismantle, the hierarchical relationships between speakers and listeners. Its effect, particularly from such renowned lecturers as James and Washington, is gained partly from the flattery of listeners whom the great men have deigned to address as fellows, an act which paradoxically adds to the lustre of their greatness.

Popularizers of the conversational style at the turn of the century both responded to and helped shape new standards of eloquence. Conversationaism became so prevalent in oratorical performance, writes Jamieson, that the very notion of "public address" seemed obsolete. In the twentieth century, she observes, "fiery oratory now gave way to the fireside chat."
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Nowhere is the paradox of de-hierarchizing rhetoric more evident than in the conversationalism of Franklin Roosevelt, to whose "fireside chats" Jamison alludes. Roosevelt's personable "plain folks" approach in the "chats" belied his patrician upbringing and concealed his extraordinary, disability-imposed, isolation from the public.23 More fundamentally, his collaborative rhetoric masked and supported perhaps the greatest concentration of power in the history of the American presidency.

Roosevelt's "fireside chats" have been regarded as epitomizing the conversational style in public address. The more than two dozen radio addresses that Roosevelt advisors and scholars have designated as "fireside chats"28 have been distinguished from his other speeches on the basis of differences in the place of their delivery (the White House), their immediate audience (Roosevelt friends, family and advisors), their content, and their style.27 The "fireside chats" employed simple language, homely analogies, self-reference and other elements of conversationalism to assist in the implied construction of a more intimate relationship between the President and his radio listeners. Roosevelt, according to John Sharon, regarded the fireside chats as "his only opportunity to talk directly with each individual citizen of the country."29 The medium of radio combined a mass audience, estimated at over one hundred million listeners for some of the chats,29 with the intimacy of the family parlor or kitchen where individuals or small groups of listeners gathered to hear the broadcasts. As mass media multiplied listeners and magnified the literal distances between speakers and audiences, they ironically reinforced the movement toward speaking styles associated with smaller, face-to-face encounters.

Roosevelt wrote that in preparing for the chats he tried to visualize individual listeners, such as "a man at work on a new building, a girl behind a counter, and a farmer in his field."30 Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who attended many of the chats, observed that Roosevelt's effort to visualize personal interaction with individual radio listeners extended to his physical delivery of the speeches. Unseen by his radio audience, Roosevelt simulated the behavior of one engaged in face-to-face conversation:

As he talked his head would nod and his hands would move in simple, natural, comfortable gestures. His face would smile and light up as though he were actually sitting on the front porch or in the parlor with them. People felt this, and it bound them to him in affection.31

Roosevelt's framing of his relationship with his audience moved him from the platform above the listener to an adjoining seat on the porch swing; it plucked the listener from a crowded auditorium to a personal audience with the president. "You felt he was there talking to you," remembered Richard Stout, "not to 50 million others, but to you personally."32 Despite their contrivances (even the fireplace was fake), the fireside chats created for many listeners an extraordinary sense of immediacy and personal involvement in the issues raised. Roosevelt sought to forge personal identification with listeners against common foes, whether resurgent Hoovers, lingering isolationists or an obstructionist Congress and Supreme Court, whose members were portrayed as devoid of the understanding and embrace of audience interests that he displayed in the fireside chats.

For all their informal manner and personal appeals, Roosevelt largely reserved the use of the conversational frame for moments of national crisis.33 Elevation of circumstance was met with deflation of style. Roosevelt's first fireside chat was broadcast on March 12, 1933 (one week after his inauguration), in the midst of a major banking crisis that threatened mass withdrawals by depositors. Within the conversational frame, Roosevelt sought to restore confidence in the banking system and to identify and answer the questions and concerns that listeners might have.34 The dialogical style of the address suggested the attentiveness and responsiveness of a caring partner in conversation. It also affirmed the power and importance of the individual listener, to whose decision not to make a run on the banks Roosevelt successfully appealed. The fireside chats have long been regarded as efforts to assuage fears and restore calm.35 They also, however, invested listeners with a sense of what they

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"themselves could do to help retrieve or enhance their personal security," as Sharon has observed. De-hierarchizing rhetoric, framed as conversational, may be employed in the attempt to gain citizens' support and instill in them a sense of responsibility. It is used in the delicate enterprise of building hope while simultaneously lowering expectations of government performance.

Roosevelt's skilled and successful use of the conversational frame in public address has been a conscious model for later presidents faced with the demands of the modern rhetorical presidency. Jimmy Carter invoked certain attributes of the fireside chat, to decidedly less gratifying effect, in his 1977 and 1979 addresses on energy policy (the 1977 presentation featured Carter with fireplace and cardigan sweater). As in Roosevelt's chats, Carter's energy conservation addresses explicitly identify audience interests, motivations and resistances in an attempt to place the apparent burden of action upon the listener. "I will do my best," he tells his audience, "but I will not do it alone." Carter, however, proved unable to negotiate what has been termed the rhetorical "paradox of authority," in which agents attempt to promote self-determination by those within their sphere of influence. Unlike Roosevelt, Carter chose to downplay government agency through the apparent indictment of his own leadership and to transfer responsibility to listeners by blaming them for the country's problems. Roosevelt's use of the conversational style to build identification gave way to self-defeating sermonizing in Carter's pious hands. Carter's efforts to construct a conversational frame for his interaction with his listeners were undercut by his simultaneous assumption of a position of moral authority, through which he might preach against the public's spiritual and political "malaise."

Conversationalism is often employed as an imitation of populism, as the speaker attempts to craft a persona that appears, as Carter did, not to be merely "for the people" or "of the people." For Ronald Reagan, whose "style is to conversational, intimate, electronic communication what the speeches of Cicero were to fiery oratory," according to Jameson, the conversational frame was employed to convey a sense that his presidency was grounded in "common sense and in trust in the people." The conversational style was perfectly suited to the stated commitment of the "Reagan Revolution" to "get the government off our backs" (emphasis added), because it both enacted this shift of responsibility and joined the President with his listeners in common plight and plane.

The use of the conversational frame lays claim to what Shotter has termed "knowing of the third kind": not "knowing that" or "knowing how," but "knowing from" within a group or situation, speaking from "knowledge-held-in-common with others." Through the adoption of conversational attributes, a speaker may seek to diminish his or her perceived responsibility while empowering or seeming to empower the individual listener. Alternatively, the identificative bond formed through such collective "conversations" may be used to legitimate the use of hierarchized power as undertaken "on the people's behalf."

Not all "conversational" oratory, however, is populist in its appeals or broadly inclusive in its intentions or realignments. For groups striving to establish power and autonomy, the conversational frame may be constructed in public address in order to enact and enforce the differentiation of one group from others.

Exclusive Conversation

Conversations, as most of us have been made painfully aware at some point in our lives, can be exclusive as well as inclusive. The very qualities, such as intimacy and identification, that make a given conversation meaningful to some participants may render it impenetrable to others present. "To communicate well in one set of relations," Duncan observes, "we must reject another." Such slights may be unintentional or deliberate, creating an inner circle of privileged partners and an outer circle of baffled bystanders.

The conversational frame in public address may similarly exclude some and privilege others. The exclusive frame divides the audience in their relationships with the speaker, suggesting identification and intimacy with some, but not others. As in private conversation, such targeting may be deliberate or unconscious, yet glaringly clear to those excluded. Naomi Wolf has described her experience as one of several hundred female speaker (and graduate of a excluded women listeners in our institution). Exclusive targeting a message. John Kennedy's personal and intimate of his exclusion from full partici Throughout the address, Kerry But Kennedy's underlying not specific:

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of several hundred female members of the graduating class at Yale who were (not) addressed by speaker (and graduate of an all-male Yale) Dick Cavett. Cavett's offensive "locker-room humor" excluded women listeners from his chummy remarks, leaving them, in Wolf's words, "orphanned from our institution."44

Exclusive targeting may be unintentional and at odds with the speaker's aims and ostensible message. John Kennedy's much-praised civil rights address of June 11, 1963, perhaps the most personal and intimate of his televised speeches, paradoxically "orphans" Black Americans whose exclusion from full participation in American society provides the very subject for his address. Throughout the address, Kennedy uses the pronoun "we" interchangeably with "my fellow Americans." But Kennedy's underlying notion of who "we" (and, by extension, "my fellow Americans") are is race-specific:

We cannot say to 10 percent of the population that you can't have that right; that your children can't have the chance to develop whatever talents they have; that the only way that they are going to get their rights is to go into the streets and demonstrate. I think we owe them and we owe ourselves a better country than that.45 (Emphasis added)

By operationally redefining "we," and by extension, "my fellow Americans," to mean white Americans, Kennedy patronizingly and paradoxically reinforces the very exclusion he decryes. If conversation is, as Duncan has described it, an arena "in which talkers can meet as equals," to be excluded from conversation is to be rendered secondary and disempowered.46 To speak conversationally to one subgroup of an audience divides the listeners into those who are peers and important to the speaker's aims, and those who are irrelevant or adversarial.

Although, as in the preceding examples, the construction of an exclusive conversational frame is sometimes inadvertent, it is in other instances a conscious rhetorical strategy. To speak in intimacy and identification to one subgroup of an audience, while enforcing a calculated distance from other listeners, is to enact a degree of autonomy and separation. The speaker's framing of his or her interaction with the audience divides the listeners according to who is able to participate. The act of enforcing such distance may be a powerful expression of a speaker's philosophy or political objectives.

Structures of power prevalent in society at large are sometimes inverted in a particular speaking situation, when those marginalized by dominant discourses elsewhere in society themselves construct exclusive conversations, producing a reversal of conversational roles accorded those included and excluded in the exchange. The conversational frame is employed in such situations as a counter-discourse grounded in a bond of common experience, identity and authority. By dramatically disengaging audiences perceived to be powerful and intrusive, a speaker and cohort audience may enact autonomy and reassert power by deciding who can experience a rhetorical situation. Linda Horwitz has described such this strategy as "rhetorical separatism."47 She recounts the efforts of lesbian separatist Ana R. Kissed to induce the males in her audience to leave, partly so that she might speak in more confidential and less inhibited ways to her primary audience of women, but more fundamentally so that she might express "the possibility of living in contrast to the dominant structure." When males in the audience refuse Kissed's requests to leave, she casts them outside the circle of her conversation with women, referring to males in the third person while explicitly identifying with female audience members.48

In Kissed's speech, separatist rhetoric is employed in accordance with her support for the physical separation of the lesbian community from an otherwise dominant society. Others employ separatist rhetoric to enhance the autonomy and power of the primary audience by refiguring their communicative relationships within a dominant society in which, as Karen and Sonja Foss observe, "if they are heard, their perspectives are interpreted within male frameworks or deliberately are distorted in order to preserve those frameworks and the power embedded in them."49 The conversational frame may be used to construct a sphere of intimacy, understanding and identity for an affinity group while holding at arm's...
length the smothering embrace of a dominant society and its agents of power. If the rhetorical situation is to be refigured as woman's space, some argue, sympathetic males may best demonstrate their solidarity by their departure.

The rhetoric of exclusive conversation is an essential element of contemporary "identity politics," as Shotter has observed:

Instead of a "politics of power," a new "politics of identity" is beginning, a politics of access to or exclusion from a political economy of ontological opportunities for different ways of being. If one is to participate in this political economy with equal opportunity, then "membership" of the community of struggle, the tradition of argumentation, cannot be conditional: one must feel one has a right, unconditionally, to "belong."\(^\text{59}\)

The rhetorical manifestations of identity politics include not only expressions of belonging and identification, but also, and perhaps inevitably, expressions and enactment of difference and exclusivity. The strategy of rhetorical separatism may prove a bitter tonic for those who consider themselves among or allied with the "in" group, yet suddenly find themselves outside the circle of conversation. With the advent of the Black Power movement, for example, white civil rights activists of the Sixties were confronted by demands for political segregation voiced by those with whom they had previously worked in alliance.\(^\text{51}\) White involvement was viewed by modern Black nationalists (as it had been by many Black abolitionists a century before) as unreliable, dominating, and prone to the perpetuation of "racist myths of dependence."\(^\text{52}\)

Through rhetorical as well as political separatism, Black Power advocates such as Stokely Carmichael (now Kwame Toure) sought to "reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt."\(^\text{53}\) Carmichael rejected the coalition politics of King and Bayard Rustin and abandoned their goal of integration. Instead of seeking to enlist the support of whites, he insisted that "it's time black people stop begging and take what belongs to them."\(^\text{54}\) Carmichael asserted the primacy of "talking to black people"; white audiences, he explained, don't realize "that they are our problem."\(^\text{55}\)

Yet Carmichael continued to speak to white as well as Black audiences. When he explained Black power to a white audience in Whitewater, Wisconsin, on February 6, 1967, Carmichael employed a rhetoric of separatism that both rationalized and enacted the exclusion of whites from participation in the movement. His presentation consists of two parts and is conveyed in two very different frames, one conversational and one impersonally expository. Both are fundamentally exclusionary. The bulk of his presentation consists of reading a previously published article. He makes clear to his audience that what they will hear was not crafted with his immediate listeners or occasion in mind; he holds up two articles, then decides which to read.

Carmichael's brief introductory remarks are conversational in style: apparently spontaneous, self-referential, and witty. Yet these very qualities are employed by Carmichael to reinforce rather than bridge an edgy distance from his white listeners, who are obliged to recognize that they are not the intended partners of this conversation. As Ronald Wardhaugh explains:

"Sometimes you find yourself in situations which cause you to wonder why you are present. You go to a party and find everyone is interested in topics that have no interest for you and in discussing them in terms you cannot relate to. You wander into a ceremony the language and structure of which mystify you. . . . The vast majority of people learn to avoid recurrences of the experience; they can make no contribution nor do they wish to."\(^\text{46}\)

This is precisely what Carmichael remarks, but by the structuring of the situation in which the participants are placed, where even his presence in the audience is brought to bear on his perceived inadequacy in the eyes of the audience. The ironic twist of Carmichael's remarks reveals his astute understanding of the hierarchical targeting of an audience consisting of those he describes as "my people" and those he sees as "their people.""\(^\text{39}\)

Through rhetorical as well as political separatism, Black Power advocates such as Stokely Carmichael (now Kwame Toure) sought to "reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt."\(^\text{53}\) Carmichael rejected the coalition politics of King and Bayard Rustin and abandoned their goal of integration. Instead of seeking to enlist the support of whites, he insisted that "it's time black people stop begging and take what belongs to them."\(^\text{54}\) Carmichael asserted the primacy of "talking to black people"; white audiences, he explained, don't realize "that they are our problem."\(^\text{55}\)

Yet Carmichael continued to speak to white as well as Black audiences. When he explained Black power to a white audience in Whitewater, Wisconsin, on February 6, 1967, Carmichael employed a rhetoric of separatism that both rationalized and enacted the exclusion of whites from participation in the movement. His presentation consists of two parts and is conveyed in two very different frames, one conversational and one impersonally expository. Both are fundamentally exclusionary. The bulk of his presentation consists of reading a previously published article. He makes clear to his audience that what they will hear was not crafted with his immediate listeners or occasion in mind; he holds up two articles, then decides which to read.

Carmichael's brief introductory remarks are conversational in style: apparently spontaneous, self-referential, and witty. Yet these very qualities are employed by Carmichael to reinforce rather than bridge an edgy distance from his white listeners, who are obliged to recognize that they are not the intended partners of this conversation. As Ronald Wardhaugh explains:

"Sometimes you find yourself in situations which cause you to wonder why you are present. You go to a party and find everyone is interested in topics that have no interest for you and in discussing them in terms you cannot relate to. You wander into a ceremony the language and structure of which mystify you . . . . The vast majority of people learn to avoid recurrences of the experience; they can make no contribution nor do they wish to."\(^\text{46}\)
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This is precisely Carmichael's message, and one conveyed not only by the literal text of his remarks, but by the structure of his interaction with white listeners. In his opening sentences, he makes pointed but obscure reference to Ben Bella, who is not identified as an Algerian revolutionary and likely unknown to many in the audience. It is one of several in-jokes employed in his introduction that are unexplained for the general audience. "The brothers got that," he remarks after one, referring to a handful of Black companions who have accompanied him to the talk. "You let us have one in joke, won't you?" he asks in mock supplication. He explains in answer to audience complaints regarding his soft-spokenness that he was trained to be quiet by his mother, who warned him that "Negroes are too loud." "So since I didn't want to be a Negro," he explains, "since then I've tried to become soft." Carmichael's irony leaves no comfortable ground on which his white listeners may stand. Just as Kennedy spoke to his audiences of "we" and "us" in racially specific ways, Carmichael inverts the hierarchical targeting through which African Americans have traditionally been excluded from "the national conversation."

Carmichael constructs a conversational frame for the introduction to his address through which to enact the philosophy of separatism professed in the essay he then reads. His essay suggests a rhetorical task as prerequisite for meaningful political change: "To do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized." Carmichael's exclusionary conversation is designed to create the space in which such autonomy might be exercised. His conversational introduction embraces those few African Americans who have accompanied him. Carmichael's tone shifts from informal to formal, personal to impersonal as he presents the remainder of his prepared text to the white audience.

"By addressing some at the expense of others," writes Molefi Asante, "he or she may significantly alter the outcome of a speech." The selection or construction of an audience is as creative a task as choosing what to say; and in persuasive cases, the one is assisted by the other. Just as Roosevelt's fireside chats were designed to create a bond of identification with individual listeners and to transfer to them a sense of enhanced power, community and responsibility, separatist rhetoric may employ the conversational frame in order to create or reinforce a community of discourse. Unlike the broadly inclusionary appeals and motives normally ascribed to the "conversational style" in public address, however, the aims of separatist rhetoric are to enhance the power and autonomy of some by disempowering and excluding the participation of others. The exclusive conversation is sometimes a poignant enactment of separation and the reversal of power relations.

Can I Get a Witness?

Private conversations between individuals sometimes go public, as one or both participants decide to enlist witnesses to the substance or occurrence of their exchange. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan has described the African American practice of "loud-talking," by which one hopes "to achieve some desired effect on the addressee" by speaking at a volume that "permits hearers other than the addressee." Like rhetorical separatists, private conversationalists who go public divide their audiences between direct participants in the conversation and those outside the inner circle of address. In this case, however, the inner circle is far more limited, as the entire ostensible audience is cast outside the interaction.

Unlike separatist rhetoric, such conversational configurations assign some purpose, power and responsibility to the observational role. Private conversations that go public speak differently to their different audiences. The "observers" in such a situation may be regarded as the primary audience and the ostensible addressee as a mere prop through which to reach others. Alternatively, the witness provided by extended listeners and the public nature of an "exchange" may be used to increase accountability for one's designated partner in conversation. This was the case in Elie Wiesel's address at the White House on April 19, 1985, in which he recast his acceptance speech upon receipt of the
Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement as a conversation between himself and President Ronald Reagan, conducted in public view. On April 11, just over a week before Wiesel's speech, the White House announced the itinerary of President Reagan's upcoming trip to Europe. Included was a wreath-laying ceremony at the military cemetery in Bitburg, Germany, designed to improve relations with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and to promote U.S.-German reconciliation. On April 15, it was revealed that Bitburg cemetery contained the graves of over four dozen members of the Waffen S.S. Despite protests from Jewish leaders and a petition signed by fifty-three U.S. Senators urging that he cancel the wreath-laying ceremony, President Reagan reaffirmed his commitment to the event. On April 18, during Yom Hashoah, the Day of Holocaust Remembrance, Reagan spurred further protests with his remarks to reporters that "there's nothing wrong with visiting that cemetery where those young men are victims of the Nazis also ... They were victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps."61

Prior to his remarks at the White House on April 19, Wiesel had already met twice before in private conversations with President Reagan in order to persuade him not to go to Bitburg. One such meeting took place immediately prior to the medal presentation ceremony.62 Dissatisfied with their private conversations and outraged at Reagan's continued insistence upon visiting Bitburg, Wiesel contemplated refusing to attend the ceremony at which President Reagan was expected to present him with the medal. Instead, Wiesel transformed the occasion of his acceptance speech into a public conversation with the President, whose remarks preceded his own.63 Wiesel casts his address as a dialogue between two individuals, President Reagan and himself. Wiesel explicitly directs his remarks to "Mr. President" eighteen times in his ten-minute speech. He uses "you" and "your" an additional nineteen times in unmistakable reference to President Reagan. He plainly states to whom he is speaking: "So may I speak to you, Mr. President, with respect and admiration, of the events that happened." Wiesel identifies Reagan as the audience whose actions he hopes to influence through the instrument of the speech:

May I, Mr. President, if it's possible at all, implore you to do something else, to find another way, another site. That place, Mr. President is not your place. Your place is with the victims of the SS.

The speech is constituted as a conversation between two individuals; the unmistakable "you" is addressed by Wiesel's "I," as he makes explicit self-reference throughout. As a survivor of the Holocaust who has written and spoken extensively of his experiences, Wiesel appears as an apparition from the past that Reagan has forgotten and as a victim of the crimes the President had presumed to forgive. Even in his self-proclaimed inarticulateness about the ineffable horror of the Holocaust ("Words—they die on my lips."), Wiesel evokes a set of images and memories that bring the weight of that past to bear upon Reagan's decision.64

Wiesel enforces the dialogical structure of the address by physically turning away from the studio audience and television cameras to look directly at President Reagan, seated only ten feet away on the stage. The wire service photographs accompanying published reports of Wiesel's speech accept and reinforce his dialogical frame for the event. Wiesel is shown with head turned away from the camera and gesticulating toward Reagan; the studio audience has been cropped.65 President Reagan's staff joined Wiesel in the effort to frame the speech as conversational in order to downplay the confrontational nature of the encounter.

But Wiesel's public encounter with Reagan does not merely duplicate the form of their private conversations. The words are not new to Reagan; indeed, Wiesel had presented a copy of his remarks to Reagan the day before.66 What is new is the extended audience, who are called upon to witness the exchange between Wiesel and Reagan to evaluate the President's response to it. When private conversations go public, as Wardhaugh explains, spectators are enlisted as agents of accountability.
A private argument can be extended to become a performance put on for the benefit of spectators—either to inform them or involve them in some way. Conversations can go public. Of course, once the spectators have been brought into the action in this way then the public theatre that was temporarily achieved becomes a kind of private theatre once more. A conversation may be designed or conducted to be overheard, but once it is overheard and involves the new party then new roles must be subscribed to by all parties. The play now has a new, enlarged cast of characters and is in that respect a different play; it is no longer being performed to entertain others, for the others have become part of the action. 57

Wiesel constructs concentric audiences for his address through differential targeting. The relationship between multiple audiences may be said to be concentric when the speaker’s transaction with one audience becomes the text for another. 88 Political campaign speeches, for example, are often designed for concentric audiences. Campaign appearances are scheduled to attract press coverage, through which an extended audience hears not only selected portions of the address, but learns of its presentation to a particular group and of that group’s response to the speaker’s presentation. The illocutionary act of speaking to one audience may become a perlocutionary act when “overheard.” 69 By the act of saying something to one audience, one may say something else to another.

Carmichael and others who employ separatist rhetoric also differentially target their listeners, creating conversational exchanges with their intimate audiences while casting other listeners present as bystanders who might overhear but never fully comprehend or join that conversation. For Wiesel, the assembled immediate audience is not divided through differential targeting, but united, enlisted to witness a “conversational” exchange between the speaker and another member of the platform party. The extended audience is educated in the moral responsibilities of the President as Reagan himself is.

By speaking to Reagan before a national audience, Wiesel constructs a situation in which the President will be seen by himself, hearing the arguments first-hand. He cannot blame others for the rejection of Wiesel’s appeal or ignore what the world has witnessed him receive. Wiesel thus cuts off two escape routes through which Reagan had earlier sought to evade responsibility. 99 Wiesel dismisses concerns about political ramifications for U.S. diplomatic relations with Germany:

Oh, we know there are political and strategic reasons. But this issue, as all issues related to that awesome event, transcends politics and diplomacy. The issue here is not politics, but good and evil. And we must never confuse them, for I have seen the SS at work, and I have seen their victims.

Wiesel implicitly compares Reagan’s political concerns about cancellation of the Bitburg visit to Allied rationalization of their acquiescence to the Holocaust. “Jews were killed by the enemy,” Wiesel observes, “but betrayed by their so-called Allies who found political reasons to justify their indifference or passivity.” Wiesel collapses past and present, equating the moral responsibilities faced in each. As a self-proclaimed contemporary ally of Jews, Reagan’s political excuses for continuing the trip as planned are unacceptable.

Wiesel also cuts off another escape route already tested by the President’s staff: the claim that the President did not know about the SS graves in Bitburg. During the previous week, the White House had leaked to the press that the decision had been made by members of the President’s staff (notably Michael Deaver) without the President’s knowledge. Presidential advisor Richard Darman later explained that such delegation of responsibility and the willingness of the press to accept it were the keys to the so-called “Teflon Presidency,” to which blame for such disasters as the Iran-Contra scandal or the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon never seemed to stick:

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The press doesn't say there's something wrong with Reagan's policies. They say party
A in the White House is fighting with Party B about the policy. It tends to insulate
the President from substantive criticism and convert it into personality stories about
conflicts between individuals within the Administration beneath the level of the
President.71

Wiesel explicitly rules out further use of this line of defense by accepting its past validity. "I am
convinced as you have told us earlier when we spoke," Wiesel says, bringing their past private
conversations into the public forum, "that you were not aware of the presence of SS graves in the
Bitburg cemetery. Of course you didn't know," Wiesel agrees, "But now we are all aware." This line
expresses the essence of Wiesel's rhetorical strategy. It brackets the present encounter ("now") as laden
with moral decisions separable from those that have preceded it. It alerts the extended circle of
witnesses ("we are all aware") to what Reagan has now been told, and by whom. Reagan's personal
responsibility is established in full view of the public.

Wiesel's acceptance of Reagan's excuses for his prior statements and expressions of moral
solidarity with Reagan ("We were never on two sides. We were on the same side. We were always on
the side of justice, always on the side of memory, against the SS and what they represent." are
somewhat disingenuous. Even "if Reagan were to find a way to cancel Bitburg," he explained to a
German reporter shortly after his address, "we would all know anyway that he had really wanted to
go."72 Wiesel withheld such opinions from the American press. In his White House address, he uses
the conversational frame to avoid the appearance of presumptuous antagonism. Wiesel strategically
employs the conversational acts of "requesting," "informing" and "advice-giving"73 among presumed
friends so as to avoid easy dismissal of his remarks and to hold the President accountable to the "shared
principles" on which he has claimed their relationship is based. Wiesel's remarks are not "loud-
talking," described by Mitchell-Kernan as an openly "hostile and aggressive speech act" that
demonstrates "that the speaker is not concerned about the possibility of permanently antagonizing his
addressee."74 Whatever he may feel towards Reagan, Wiesel takes great care to adopt a tone of
respectful entreaty.

By framing his remarks as a conversation among allies, Wiesel also heightens the expectation that
Reagan will personally respond. As Wardhaugh observes,

> there is a general expectation that certain kinds of utterances occur in pairs: greetings;
questions and answers; requests and either compliances or refusals. Consequently, any
response to a greeting, question, or request will be interpreted in relation to this usual
paired relationship and will be judged by the initiating speaker to be either an adequate
or a deficient second member of the pair . . . Once a statement is made to you or a
request is made of you, you must react to it somehow.75

In his statements to the press before and after the speech Wiesel described his rhetorical aim in
narrowly personal terms: to dissuade Ronald Reagan from going to Bitburg.76 It is a request that not
only demands response but assigns the responsibility for response to a specific individual, whose
reciprocal words or deeds must be seen in relation to Wiesel's words. Wiesel prepares his extended
audience to understand the meaning of Reagan's refusal to cancel the Bitburg visit and to assign
responsibility for this act to Reagan himself. When in his White House address Wiesel quotes Abe
Rosenthal regarding the persecution of Jews, he is ultimately providing a standard by which Reagan's
actions may be judged: "Forgive them not Father, for they knew what they did." By taking their private
conversation public, conducting it before a concentric audience of witnesses, Wiesel reveals what the
president knew and when he knew it.

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Conclusion

"Rhetoric," write Bender and Wellbery, "is the art of positionality in address." Speeches include not only tokens of their implied orators and audiences, but of the implied relationships between them. The use of the conversational frame in public address is a complex and varied rhetorical enterprise through which orators seek to enact or to suggest the realignment of speaker-audience relations. One important variable in the use of the conversational frame and in the speaker-audience relationships thereby implied is inclusivity. In this essay, we have examined three points on a continuum of inclusivity, through which orators variously construct their relationships with different listeners.

Since the nineteenth century, public speakers have routinely designed their addresses so as to appear to engage their entire audiences in conversation. The adoption of conversational attributes in public address is designed not only to suggest intimacy and identification, but to enact (or seem to enact) the speaker's message of self-determination and audience responsibility. A rhetorical transaction may be framed as broadly conversational in a deliberate attempt to construct or reconstruct the public identity of the speaker and to reshape or disguise the hierarchical relationship between speaker and audience(s). The inclusive conversational frame may be used to embrace one's entire audience as ostensible partners in conversations, with whom the speaker shares power and responsibility. In addition, however, this frame may legitimate the speaker to exercise his or her own power "on behalf of" those addressed.

Secondly, speakers sometimes employ the conversational frame in public address to define and differentiate among audiences, privileging some as partners in the discourse while placing others, including some of those present, outside the circle of interaction. These exclusions may be inadvertent or deliberate, but are always a discourse of power and marginalization.

Finally, we have examined the efforts of speakers to construct conversations conducted before, but not with, their ostensible listeners. These dialogues are meant to be "overheard," and the audiences who witness them, although excluded from direct participation in the immediate exchange, are nevertheless constructed as relevant actors who are encouraged to reflect and respond.

The allusion to or simulation of conversation in public address may sometimes amount to no more than the affectation of stylistic attributes associated with informal and interpersonal talk; an act of conformity to the current oratorical fashion. However, as the preceding analysis has shown, the conversational frame in public address sometimes signals far more complicated and significant undertakings, and may be employed in order to transform or seem to transform the relationship between speaker and audience. By framing their oratory as "conversational," rhetors propose a certain positioning of themselves and their audiences within a network of reciprocal rights and duties. By persuasively "framing" the audience and speaker-audience relationship in various ways, the rhetor makes certain responses easier and others more difficult.

Treating communication as a form of action rather than a mere representation of ideas and conditions, we are led to an understanding that at least part of what is done in public address action is the positioning of the speaker and the audience within a "moral order" of rights and responsibilities. Consider Wiesel's framing of his speech as a conversation between himself and President Reagan in the presence of many others who were defined as observers. Whatever else Wiesel accomplished, he placed Reagan in the position that he so assiduously avoided during his Presidency: that of having to respond directly to one who disagreed with him. In their analysis of the "rhetorical ecology" of the Reagan Administration, Weiler and Pearce argue that the "Teflon-like" nature of Reagan's rhetoric derived from his appropriation of three discourses: populism, the "National Security" discourse, and "civil religion." One common element among these discourses is that they provide no legitimate position for opposition. Within these discourses, anyone who opposed Reagan's policies was already defined as an oppressor of the people, a traitor, and a heretic. As a result, Reagan customarily positioned himself as talking with his supporters about his opponents, rather than confronting them -- or having to respond to them -- directly. Wiesel's dramatic framing of the conversation put Reagan...
in a second-person position with the obligation of first-person response to the criticisms made of him, depriving him of his preferred and more practiced role of talking about his critics rather than to them.92

The shift in oratorical styles over the past two centuries toward more "conversational" genres is not merely a matter of style, just as "framing" is not merely a cue for how to interpret the content of a speech. By framing a speech as "conversational" rhetors position themselves and their audience within a matrix of reciprocal rights and duties which may have much to do with the success of the speech. Although oratory may not be an act of true conversation, the simulation of and allusion to conversational discourse and relationships are ubiquitous and intriguing features of modern public address. "Framing" -- whether as conversational or otherwise -- is an important part of the inventionary aspects of rhetoric and deserves far more attention than it has thus far been received by scholars of public address.

NOTES


9Jameson, Elocution,

9Kenneth Cmiel, Demos (New York: William Morrow (Carbondale: Southern Illinois)

9Wendell Phillips' lyce Wentworth Higgins as conv had just been saying to a far James Brewer Stewart, Wende.

9Paul Fatout, ed., Mark

9Charles Neider, ed., The.

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9Roy L. Hill, Rhetoric q

9Leon Edel, Henry Jam

9Edel, Henry James, 28

9Edel, Henry James, 28

9Susan Sontag, "On Style 1966), 17-18. See also Robert

9Cmiel, Democratic Elh


9Jamieson, Elocution, 

9Hugh G. Gallagher, FL Trumpets: The Call of Leader 28

9There is some disagreement chats," with estimates ranging fit Fireside Chats (Norman: U. o

9John H. Sharon, "The

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9Letter to Helen Wilkin

9Frances Perkins, The K

9Richard Strout, "The Pr

9Sharon, "The Fireside t

9Haldorf R. Ryan, Fran

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9Ruhite and Levy, FDF

9Sharon, "The Fireside t

9Jimmy Carter, "Tele

9Rhetoric (1961)--to the Press

9Robert Branham and t

9Reconstruction," The Quarter

9Jamieson, Elocution,
to the criticisms made of him, is critics rather than to them. The or "conversational" genres is w to interpret the context of a live and their audience within the the success of the speech. imitation of and allusion to ing features of modern public portant of the invention received by scholars of public


12Jamieson, Elocution, 56.
14Wendell Phillips' lyceum speeches of the 1830s and '40s, for example, were described by Thomas Wentworth Higginson as conversational in character, "as if he simply repeated, in a slightly louder tone, what he had just been saying to a familiar friend at his elbow." Wendell Phillips (Boston: 1884), 265-267; quoted in James Brewer Stewart, Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U. Press, 1986), 186.
19Edel, Henry James, 281-282.
20Edel, Henry James, 281.
22Cmiel, Democratic Elocution, 35.
24Jamieson, Elocution, 56.
26There is some disagreement over the actual number of Roosevelt speeches that should be termed "fireside chats," with estimates ranging from twenty-eight to thirty-one. Russell D. Buhite and David W. Levy, eds., FDR's Fireside Chats (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1992), xv.
35Buhite and Levy, FDR's Fireside Chats, xv.
39Jamieson, Elocution, 144-145.

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In Windt, *Presidential Rhetoric*, 49.


Stokely Carmichael Explains Black Power to a Black Audience in Detroit," 86. Malcolm X also describes the all-black meetings sponsored by Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam: "The white man was barred from attendance--the first time the American black man had ever dreamed of such a thing. And that brought us new attacks from the white man and his black puppet. 'Black segregationists...racists!' Accusing us of segregation! Across America, whites barring blacks was standard." *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 248.


See photograph accom (20 April 1985), 1. Similar x (29 April 1985), 17-18; and *Weekly* (6 May 1985), 46-47.

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Ronald Wardhaugh,*

Robert James Branch Address," *Quarterly Journal in Eclipse of Reason and Th*


For a behind-the-scenes the Bitburg trip, see Lou C.

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"with a personable, articulate with specific proposals for Branhman, "A Rhetorical A

America, 178.

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70Ronald Wardhaugh, How Conversation Works, 44-45.


73For a behind-the-scenes account of the Reagan Administration's efforts to minimize political damage from the Bitburg trip, see Lou Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 573-588.


75Interview With Elie Wiesel," 385.

76Ronald Wardhaugh, How Conversation Works, 184.


78Ronald Wardhaugh, How Conversation Works, 73, 170.


85Michail Gorbatchev similarly discomfited Reagan at the Reykjavik summit. Reagan's foreign policy discourses were "an arsenal for speeches about the Soviet Union." They provided few useful resources for talking "with a personable, articulate, and apparently sincere representative of the Soviet Union," particularly one armed with specific proposals for ending the arms race. See W. Barnett Pearce, Deborah K. Johnson, and Robert J. Branhman, "A Rhetorical Ambush at Reykjavik," in Weiler and Pearce, ed., Reagan and Public Discourse in America, 178.