

ADLAI E. STEVENSON, "A NEW AMERICA," ACCEPTANCE ADDRESS AT THE  
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION (17 AUGUST 1956)

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**Abstract:** While Adlai Stevenson's "New America" address at the 1956 Democratic National Convention symbolized his presidential campaign's failure, the ideas of the speech would serve as a bridge between the New Deal and the Democrats of the 1960s. To construct his vision of America's future, Stevenson followed a jeremiadic framework, as he argued for greater moral responsibility on behalf of the American people to use their prosperity for public virtue.

**Key Words:** Adlai Stevenson, Democratic Party, New America, jeremiad, Cold War, presidential campaigns, national conventions

Adlai Stevenson's most famous quip may have been his declaration of solidarity with his fellow intellectuals: "Eggheads of the world unite, lest we lose our yolks!"<sup>1</sup> Not only does this betray the statesman's legendary self-deprecation but it also contains a playfully defensive look at his own legacy. The stigma of being labeled as an "intellectual" has been problematic for many an American public figure, but perhaps the "egghead" tag has never been associated more devastatingly with one individual than it was with Adlai Stevenson. At the time of his ascent into the public consciousness, this was a stinging epithet, which Stevenson accepted with trademark wit and humility. Over time, "eggheadism" became a lovable part of Stevenson's rumpled charm, which the Democratic Party would appropriate into its lore, if not its public image. Adlai Stevenson became an archaic ideal for the Party, a stumping preacher with sleeves rolled up, laboring for the cause, and seemingly from an era long past. Perhaps the most famous image of him comes from a Pulitzer-Prize winning photograph taken on the 1952 presidential campaign trail. In the photo, Stevenson is feverishly editing what appears to be a speech, with the tattered, worn sole of his shoe serving as the picture's focus.<sup>2</sup> This is the face of gritty, no-nonsense politics, and Stevenson embodied this old-school tradition.

Yet, this very image of Adlai Stevenson also points to the struggles that haunted him and the defeats he faced in both of his presidential campaigns of 1952 and 1956. As the Cold War crisis unfolded during the rise of image politics in modern advertising, Americans did not want to see the sweat and dirt of a politician grappling with intellectual complexities. His penchant for self-questioning and openly doubting his abilities may well have pointed to a nobility in campaigning, but fell short in translating to votes for security and stability in the new television age. He would be unable to

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translate his image as an effective *speaker* into the role of a strong leader.<sup>3</sup> Because of this contested legacy, there is a respect and deference given Adlai Stevenson over time that always assures he will be fundamentally *disrespected*. Upon his death in 1965, even many of the tributes foreshadowed this disrespect, painting him as a commendable but sad figure in American politics. On the day after he died on a London street, the *Times* of London called Stevenson a tragic figure in history "who received honour but not power" and who "died full of disappointments" with "an element of Hamlet in him." James Reston of the *New York Times* lumped Stevenson in with "the also-rans, the good men who arrived near the top at the wrong time."<sup>4</sup> And although journalist Irving Howe praised Stevenson for being "An attractive human being," Howe ultimately concluded that he "was a man who tried to act by civilized standards within the present society, and he did not succeed."<sup>5</sup> Such epitaphs, however, ignored the legacy of Stevenson's political and ideological contributions to the Democratic Party during the 1960s.

Because of his two successive presidential losses in 1952 and 1956, we tend to forget that Stevenson was a man of ideas. His platform issues continued to shape the party well beyond his 1950s campaigns. A reassessment of his political ideas shows that his response to Eisenhower's Cold War America would quietly be adopted by the Democratic upstarts of the 1960s. For most Americans, Stevenson has faded almost completely from popular memory. For those that do remember, he has become the object lesson of how *not* to campaign. In fact, Stevenson's 1956 frustrated campaign against the Eisenhower juggernaut has generally been remembered as an exercise in futility. Yet, just three days after one of their correspondents declared Stevenson one of the most famous "men who didn't quite make it," the *New York Times* published an editorial assessing Stevenson's legacy, boldly suggesting that his "undervalued second campaign" provided most of the "intellectual basis for the later New Frontier and Great Society."<sup>6</sup> The 1956 election is precisely the campaign where Stevenson produced a comprehensive rhetorical blueprint for his successors, thus shaping the issues that would be at the forefront of the democratic ascendancy of the 1960s.

Stevenson's address to the Democratic National Convention in 1956 in Chicago was the culmination of this rhetorical blueprint. The speech would mix the visionary ideals of his 1952 campaign with the hard, bitter reality of the 1956 campaign in order to introduce his New America program. The central ideas of the New America placed Adlai Stevenson as the crucial intellectual bridge between the New Deal of the 1930s and the New Frontier and Great Society programs of the 1960s. Liberalism was still mired in the Depression-era solutions of the New Deal, but the prosperity in the postwar 1950s called for energies to be redirected.<sup>7</sup> The thrust of Stevenson's New America was to account for a moral life within the stark truths of the Cold War. Stevenson's persona throughout the speech can be seen as a classic Puritan preacher, chastising the complacency of American life under Eisenhower and offering a new path of righteousness. The New America platform was about using the new abundance to increase the quality of life and to counter what was perceived as spiritual bankruptcy. The New Deal had sought previously to restore America materially; Stevenson's New America sought to revive the country morally and spiritually.

More than just a source of new intellectual ideas, though, the speech also presented a forceful language that would eventually infuse the Democrats with a new sense of purpose. Rhetorically, Stevenson's use of moral appeals in the speech represented the American genre of the jeremiad, a recurring fixture particularly in political convention addresses. Governor Stevenson railed from his pulpit in Chicago using a language of a more straightforward and fiery tone that was new to viewers expecting his typically literary, witty, and often self-questioning rhetoric, made famous in his 1952 campaign. Like early Puritan American community leaders, Stevenson used a language and a structure for his address that first painted a vision of a wayward spiritual path that Eisenhower Americans were following. He closed then with a restatement of American exceptionalism and appeals to reifying the country's original moral covenant to share its material and spiritual wealth among its members.

Thus, while jarring for many at the time to see their beloved egghead in such a state of spiritual outrage, Adlai Stevenson's speech displayed a sober eloquence that would thread itself into later Democratic triumphs, even if it proved forgettable in the midst of a losing campaign. Biographer Herbert J. Muller wrote later of Stevenson's 1956 convention address: "With its accent on promise and decisiveness, it conveyed no such solemn sense of the difficulties and responsibilities of world leadership. I doubt that it will be read by future generations."<sup>8</sup> This analysis highlights some of those reasons why it deserves more attention. I begin with an exploration of how the speech served as an integral part of Stevenson's moral persona, followed by an interpretation of it as a reflection of key Cold War values. The final section will explore the legacy of Stevenson's New America in the discourse of the New Frontier and Great Society in 1960s America. Ultimately, the 1956 Convention speech shows a man with an arsenal of prescient ideas and a rhetorical worldview that would influence the Democratic Party for years to come, long after Adlai Stevenson stepped off his podium in Chicago.

### *All the Way Adlai: The New America in Context*

Before investigating Stevenson's Democratic Acceptance Speech in Chicago on August 17, 1956, I will first review the events that brought him to the podium on that day. What propelled the Illinois intellectual into public life and how he remained there is instrumental to understanding the symbolic choices of the "New America" address. In this section, Adlai Stevenson's formative years in public life will be examined, followed by his remarkable entrance into the 1952 campaign, and his return during the 1956 campaign after serving as the statesman of the Democratic Party. The story of his 1956 campaign, especially in comparison to lessons learned from the bitter loss of 1952, situates his words in a unique political context and the larger Cold War environment of the 1950s.

#### Entry Into Public Life: An Egghead Comes of Age

The Democratic Party was a part of Adlai Stevenson's blood and a central part of his upbringing in Bloomington, Illinois. He was born into a highly political and religious

family. His father's family saw "Grandfather Stevenson" flourish as a Democrat in Republican territory, eventually becoming Grover Cleveland's Vice President in 1892 and William Jennings Bryan's running mate in 1900. His mother's family had roots in the Unitarian Church in Bloomington, an affiliation from which Stevenson would borrow civic and moral principles that would come to shape him politically. Spiritual sentiments and the idea of individual responsibility were infused in him from a young age. He later quoted freely from the Bible, as well as from Emerson and Channing – "Unitarian standbys" he had known since his Sunday school days.<sup>9</sup> His mother's family also came from a more Republican background, having relatives who worked in Abraham Lincoln's administration; comparisons would inevitably be made between Lincoln's rhetorical language and Adlai Stevenson's. Yet, he still retained his grandfather's devotion to the Democratic Party, and his staunchly Republican hometown always made him feel like the odd-man out, contributing to his outsider mentality and a perpetual underdog spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Adlai Stevenson would enter the public sphere after studying at Princeton and receiving a law degree from Northwestern. As his career developed, his succession of jobs became focused on public service: honing his rhetorical skills at his family's Bloomington newspaper *The Pantagraph*, practicing law on his own in Chicago, and working for Franklin Roosevelt's Federal Alcohol Control Administration in Washington, D.C.<sup>11</sup> His interest in politics and especially U.S. foreign policy flourished when he served as counsel to the Secretary of the Navy in 1941 and traveled extensively during World War II.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after WWII, Stevenson's attitudes toward war would take an about-face, as he became instrumental at the State Department in the early days of the United Nations. Here he would help facilitate "the birth of [an] extraordinary infant," as he noted in a 1946 speech.<sup>13</sup> Originally selected as a delegate to the preliminary Executive Committee, he would later become its chair and a key delegate in the United Nation's Preparatory Commission. Stevenson's cosmopolitan outlook and constant pleas for global dialogue surfaced from this early entry into UN politics and would shape his conceptions of peace throughout his career.<sup>14</sup> As he would note of this period, "It was the most exacting, interesting and in many ways the most important interval of my life. After almost four years of preoccupation with war, the satisfaction of having a part in the organized search for the conditions and mechanics of peace completed my circle."<sup>15</sup> Later, Stevenson would return to these themes as President John F. Kennedy's U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Stevenson's education in domestic politics, though, was just as integral to his public life, and it came primarily from his gubernatorial bid in 1948. On returning to Chicago, after his United Nations work, he accepted the challenge to run for Governor of Illinois despite no experience in state politics. It was a tough time for Democrats, but somehow Stevenson's Herculean work ethic brought about a victory in Lincoln country.<sup>16</sup> The next four years would complete his political training and, combined with his formidable experience in international affairs, primed the man from Bloomington for bigger things.

## The Election of 1952: An Egghead Shows His Yolk

Adlai Stevenson only served one term as governor before his rise to the top of Democratic politics in the 1952 presidential election. For many, he became an intellectual cult hero almost overnight. Walter Johnson's book, *How We Drafted Adlai Stevenson*, told the story of how ordinary citizens convinced Stevenson to run for the Presidency in 1952 and how an entire movement of writers and intellectuals had faith in the Governor of Illinois' ability to continue Democratic dominance in the White House.<sup>17</sup> Outside of his drafters, though, the relative unknown was often referred to as a "sacrificial lamb" in the 1952 campaign, as a man with class who would swallow an inevitable loss with nobility.<sup>18</sup> The Republicans' successful characterization of President Harry Truman and the Democrats as the War Party crippled the Democrats. As John M. Murphy points out, the "perception was widespread that one party had been too long in power."<sup>19</sup>

Despite his loss in 1952, Stevenson's command of the English language and his embodiment of democratic virtue made an unexpected mark on American political life. Murphy accentuates the principles of civic republicanism that characterized Stevenson's 1952 rhetoric, especially in his elevation of the "public good," the self-discipline of virtuous power, and a deep respect for republican institutions.<sup>20</sup> These three qualities marked Stevenson as one who defied conventional campaign appeals and took the hard road of substantive debate. While Stevenson's detractors would accuse him of not being able to connect with the everyday voter, his willingness to speak on unpopular issues and to decry the normal conventions of politics positioned him as a refreshing political phenomenon in presidential politics.

Stevenson's speech accepting the 1952 Democratic nomination, in particular, would transcend the moment and, for many, would rise into the ranks of the great political speeches of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> One of the major threads throughout the speech is Stevenson's use of humility and his recognition of the moral solemnity of the presidency. In the address, he paints his personal uncertainties as virtues, recognizing the enormous capacity of the office for both good and evil. The heart of the speech, though, lies in his pledge to share responsibility between the people and its government. As Stevenson put it:

That is the test of a political party—the acid, final test. When the tumult and the shouting die, when the bands are gone and the lights are dimmed, there is the stark reality of responsibility in an hour of history haunted with those gaunt, grim specters of strife, dissension and materialism at home, and ruthless, inscrutable and hostile power abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Four years later, Stevenson's next acceptance address would continue these themes of moral responsibility but, through the New America concept, would propose a more concrete program that would question whether the prosperity of 1950's America was truly equitable.

At the close of the famous 1952 speech, however, Stevenson reflected on the political cost of virtue, saying: "Better we lose the election than mislead the people; and better we lose than misgovern the people."<sup>23</sup> And lose he did, by a significant landslide.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in defeat, the groundwork was laid for Stevenson's ubiquity as a moral leader throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As Alden Whitman would reflect in the *New York Times*, "Not only did Stevenson run, and run hard, but he also mounted a campaign singular in its literateness, grace, and humor."<sup>25</sup> Despite the Republican triumph, Adlai Stevenson made his way out of Illinois and secured his spotlight on the national scene.

### The Interim Period, 1952-1956: An Egghead in the Spotlight

The period between the two campaigns represented a time of formative reflection for Stevenson. This interim would also mark the gestations of the New America concept, as he observed the culture of the Eisenhower administration and came to terms with his own leadership style. As he would later say about the 1952 campaign,

The determining fact in my mind after the elections of 1952 was that I remained...the "titular head" of the Democratic party....The titular leader has no clear and defined authority within his party. He has no party office, no staff, no funds....Yet he has...an obligation to help wipe out the inevitable deficit accumulated by his party during a losing campaign, and also to do what he can to revive, reorganize, and rebuild.<sup>26</sup>

His fiery, more deliberately divisive tone in the 1956 campaign, culminating in his convention speech, would come from these productive years of learning from defeat and planning a comeback.

Stevenson's new celebrity status saw him speaking in public constantly through this period, making 111 speeches and publishing 28 articles between the two campaigns. During the 1956 campaign, scholars Russel Windes, Jr. and James A. Robinson asked the question, "Where is there another man in the history of American politics whose public image has been created and sustained so largely by his public addresses?"<sup>27</sup> He traveled extensively abroad as well, fine-tuning his foreign policy rhetoric as the Cold War tensions raged around him. Stevenson would become an outspoken critic of Joseph McCarthy and seethed at Eisenhower's appeasement of the Wisconsin senator.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the torrent of public speeches, Stevenson and his staff planned for the future by establishing a frenzied pace of "issue preparation." His advising staff would meet with him regularly from 1954 until the start of the campaign, writing position papers on the issues that would frame the New America platform.<sup>29</sup> The 1956 campaign would, as a result, see a more prepared and sharply focused Adlai Stevenson.

### The Campaign of 1956: An Egghead in Distress

By November 15, 1955, Stevenson unsurprisingly announced his candidacy for the presidency in Chicago, nine months before he would assume the stage at the convention. The presidential candidate offered hints about the impending New America program, asserting: "Seldom before has the United States faced a period of greater opportunity—and of greater danger. Our great opportunity lies in the fact that our prosperity and wealth can now be used to give all of our people the higher standards and wider opportunities which are mankind's universal dream."<sup>30</sup> His statement also entrusted the Democratic Party with ensuring the nation's prosperity and peace in the "active search for a better America."<sup>31</sup> The distribution of wealth would become a major concern of Stevenson's New America, as he sought to portray the Democrats as a David for average citizens against the Goliath of big business Republicans.

The New America also was designed to mark a clear break with the New Deal past. During a campaign event at Yale in October of 1956, Stevenson declared: "I do not believe that we Democrats have the answers for 1956 simply because we had them for 1932....I think the central issue in 1956...is that complacency contains the seeds of decay, not of growth."<sup>32</sup> In the same address, Stevenson quoted Eleanor Roosevelt on the importance of moving away from the New Deal, as she warned that, "it is a foolish thing to say that you pledge yourself to live up to the traditions of the New Deal and the Fair Deal—of course, you are proud of those traditions—but our party must live as a young party...[it] must have the courage to look ahead, to face new problems with new solutions."<sup>33</sup> For Stevenson's New America, thus, the split with the New Deal was primarily a philosophical one; while the Democrats of 1932 were concerned with material fulfillment, the Democrats of 1956 needed to offer spiritual fulfillment as well. Stevenson's platform was more concerned with the moral imbalance of a rich nation that failed to properly distribute its wealth. Arthur Schlesinger and Seymour Harris marked these differences most distinctly when they acknowledged:

The fact that our contemporary troubles tend to be spiritual rather than economic should depress only those liberals who feel that liberalism is purely a phenomenon of depression. Spiritual unemployment can be as real and as painful a fact as economic unemployment....The moment is surely approaching for a new forward surge of liberalism. It will probably not come, as did the New Deal, from the breakdown of the economic system. It will more likely come, as did the Progressive movement of the turn of the century, from an attempt to meet the moral needs of a people beset by psychological unrest.<sup>34</sup>

Stevenson's program was framed not only in terms of policy proposals but even more so as a state of mind and a dialogue of ideas, both moral and material.<sup>35</sup> In turn, the major domestic planks of the New America, namely poverty, race, and education, would all be aligned with the country's moral responsibility to correct material inequities.

The other main piece of the New America would be focused on the Cold War. Stevenson fully believed that the most important choices facing the American voters were in the foreign policy arena. His Godkin Lectures at Harvard in 1955, for example, assailed the monolithic diplomacy of the Eisenhower administration, suggesting that

international relations need not "always exist in frozen hostility."<sup>36</sup> And in what Michael H. Prosser called "one of Stevenson's most potent speeches"<sup>37</sup> during the 1956 campaign, Stevenson articulated an alternative vision of U.S. foreign policy in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 21, 1956. Stevenson fumed about the real dangers to U.S. security, attempting to unmask the lie he perceived in Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" address, and trying desperately to end the threat of the massive H-bomb.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the promise of these early salvos on foreign policy would become curiously muted throughout the 1956 campaign, as the domestic New America was explored more fully. Stevenson's senior staff members apparently believed that an emphasis on foreign policy would remind the nation of the Democrats' associations with war. Stevenson would grudgingly give in to this plan, as he sought to reinvent himself with the voters.<sup>39</sup>

In trying to reinvent himself, Stevenson found himself in a different and altogether more complex context. He was fifty-six by the time he stepped in front of the lights for his encore in Chicago, but he felt much older. The literature chronicling the 1956 campaign belies the great fatigue that enveloped him since storming the political scene in 1952, campaigning tirelessly for nine months straight by the time of his re-nomination.<sup>40</sup> His vicious dogfight in the primaries with eventual Vice Presidential nominee Estes Kefauver also sapped him of momentum. The intensity of the primaries also coincided with a rise in the costs of a modern campaign, so he experienced the exhaustion of financial resources as well.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Stevenson's tendency to micro-manage his campaign chafed at the public relations demands of the modern election.<sup>42</sup> As Schlesinger and Harris have noted, Stevenson had a deep fear of boring both his audiences and himself.<sup>43</sup> As a result, he spent vast amounts of time editing his speeches, and the painstaking editorial work would continue right up until delivery.<sup>44</sup> In 1952, such intensity held a certain old-fashioned charm. Yet, by 1956, the perpetually revised scripts conflicted with the demands of message control. William Lee Miller, a speechwriter in the 1956 campaign, would later remark that "Stevenson wanted a fresh text each time in a way that candidates since then haven't done. Everyone since then has repeated the same speech....Stevenson couldn't do that. His temperament wouldn't allow it."<sup>45</sup>

Stevenson also would often undermine his staff's attempts at image management by appearing awkward in front of television cameras, in stark contrast to President Eisenhower's campaign, which reflected the sophistication of Madison Avenue. Television was largely responsible for the advent of single-issue politics, as airtime could only highlight key selling points, but Stevenson was often unable to simplify his ideas to fit these parameters.<sup>46</sup> A study conducted during the campaign surveyed a group of scholars and political professionals on whether Stevenson speeches were effective or ineffective. Those speeches deemed most ineffective were all multi-issue speeches, and they usually revolved around controversial subjects where Stevenson's position ran counter to public opinion.<sup>47</sup> Porter McKeever put it succinctly, noting that Stevenson "overrated the voters' attention span."<sup>48</sup> Stevenson wanted to remain the podium orator in a new age of television.<sup>49</sup> He would later remark, "One of my keenest disappointments in the 1956 campaign was its failure to evoke any real



debate of issues. In the climate of opinion which then prevailed, it was easy—and politically astute—for my opponents to brush them aside."<sup>50</sup> To adjust the campaign to these political realities of 1956, Stevenson was forced to focus more on clarifying his key ideas and tempering his language. A more sober approach was needed in the new political era, and this helped contribute to the genesis of the Stevenson's New America.

And unlike in 1952, Adlai Stevenson actively sought the nomination in 1956. The 1952 campaign debuted a reluctant but heroic outsider who merely answered the call of the people to participate in the campaign. In 1956, Stevenson could no longer fall back on this Cincinnatus image of a reluctant political leader. Instead, he had to deal with questions of political ambition, thus calling into question the humility that was so central to his rhetoric. Eisenhower's calm, detached demeanor clashed with a harried Stevenson, laboring for the nomination, and this image was not lost on the voters. In order to separate himself from Eisenhower's shadow, Stevenson would have to rely on a more strict agenda of liberalism in this election, rather than the blend of civic republicanism and moral conservatism he used in 1952.<sup>51</sup> Many complained of Stevenson becoming too straightforwardly partisan; in the long term, though, these liberal issues—poverty, race, education, and international responsibility—would come to define the Democratic Party for the next decade and beyond.<sup>52</sup>

As the election neared, two foreign policy issues, though, attracted considerable attention and scorn for the former Illinois governor. As Schlesinger and Harris point out, "Unfortunately by the end of October, Stevenson's views on the many complex questions on foreign policy had become lost in the uproar over two issues: reconsidering the draft and suspending hydrogen bomb tests."<sup>53</sup> Deep into the campaign, Stevenson tried awkwardly to reintroduce these two stifled international issues back into the debate. Yet, it became quickly clear that it was too late to break the Republican Party's ownership of Cold War policy. Eisenhower's campaign showcased a weak Adlai Stevenson "giving away bombs" and dismissed his attempt at eliminating the H-bomb as an empty "theatrical gesture."<sup>54</sup> And his suggestion to end the draft also backfired, leaving him open once again to the charge that he was soft on communism.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, these charges of weakness in foreign policy were symbolic of Stevenson's larger rhetorical problems. Yet, the "New America" convention address sought to present a tougher Stevenson. His early public life, the hunger to right the pitfalls of the 1952 campaign, the productive four years between campaigns, the desire to redefine the ideals of his Party, and the frustrations of image and economic realities, would all impact Adlai Stevenson's speech on that Friday night in Chicago. Any behind-the-scenes wavering and fatigue were masked by an organized and blunt resolve. This was the biggest speech of the campaign—perhaps of his entire career—and he treated this opportunity as a chance of redemption for 1952 and a chance at changing the path of his country some ten years after the Cold War began.

### *"Objectives Not For the Timid": Assessing the New America*

In the middle of Adlai Stevenson's convention acceptance speech on August 17, 1956, he derided his Republican rivals who "fear nothing so much as change and who

want everything to stay as it is—only more so" (30).<sup>56</sup> Nothing could sum up the spirit of the New America more simply. Stevenson's conflation of fear with stagnation represented the ultimate argument against the complacency of America during the Cold War. The New America speech outlined a striking new vision of domestic and foreign issues for the Democratic Party, while pleading for a return to past ideals. This balancing of past and future in Adlai Stevenson's prescription for large-scale change represented the cornerstone of the New America. This two-fold analysis examines the exigencies of Eisenhower's America according to Stevenson, and then outlines the New America's vision of the future. Understanding the speech through the lens of the American jeremiad casts Stevenson as a prophet of the people who offered a new path of righteousness, a rhetorical form that reinforced Stevenson's new platform of ideas. The aim is to not only situate the New America in terms of Stevenson's conceptions of truth, but also to argue that rhetorical traces of the New America were still visible in subsequent political discourse of the Democratic Party, both in terms of domestic and international policies *and* the moral covenant that Stevenson envisioned.

#### Stevenson's Political Jeremiad

One of Stevenson's many biographers would refer to him as "The Last Puritan," a fitting appellation for his persona in the acceptance speech.<sup>57</sup> Stevenson would draw from America's long tradition of the Puritan jeremiad to clarify his vision for the American people. Perry Miller's study of the Puritan mind is often cited as the definitive study of jeremiad conventions. In his treatise, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Miller showed the origin of the jeremiad as a political sermon where the speaker attempts to reconcile the audience with God. Miller wrote: "the jeremiads came from something deeper than pious fraud, more profound than cant: they were the voice of a community bespeaking its apprehensions about itself."<sup>58</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch would later expand on these observations, delving even deeper into the concept of redemption for the audience by making a covenant with the past. The Puritan model, according to Bercovitch, was about the fulfillment of destiny in the city of God. He noted the underlying irony at the base of the jeremiad, as the fearful moral pronouncements became a celebration of the culture's special chosen mission. Bercovitch succinctly wrote, "their punishments confirmed their promise."<sup>59</sup>

The jeremiad, however, still possesses prominent political importance. Kurt Ritter argued that presidential nomination acceptance addresses have faithfully adopted the jeremiad as an organizing principle for their relationship to the public. Ritter posited that, "The presidential candidate offers to lead the people through repentance back to their fundamental national values and, thereby, restore America to its former greatness."<sup>60</sup> The American Dream becomes a civil religion of sorts that orients the culture back to a righteous path after they have been led astray. This form works most notably for a challenger against the reigning party, for the candidate can attack the incumbent for not upholding the Dream. In Ritter's analysis, the candidate also recognizes that America's drift from its ideal past is not a fatal flaw, but a test of national character.<sup>61</sup> The presidential candidate, while not following the rigid structure

of the Puritan jeremiad, fulfills their essential qualities by interpreting the problems of the present, bridging the ideals of the past with the policies of the future, and promoting a social community of shared responsibility.<sup>62</sup>

As previously noted, moral responsibility both as an individual and a collective constituted a major part of Stevenson's upbringing and informed the rhetoric of his public life. His prophetic stance in the New America was not a new persona for him, but seldom before had he fused such a focused moral attack with a platform of change. Throughout the analysis of the speech itself, Ritter's parameters for the modern jeremiad are most evident and help inform Stevenson's lamentations against Eisenhower's America.

### The Problems of Eisenhower's America

The New America's greatest exigence was the perceived national complacency of post-WWII America. Adlai Stevenson's prophetic warnings to his Democratic audience visualized the unparalleled prosperity as a curse against the republic unless properly harnessed. The worn-shoe, rolled-up sleeves doggedness is evident here, as Stevenson railed against the genial obliviousness of Eisenhower's Cold War consumerism. When attacking Eisenhower's uncritical press, Stevenson substantiated his case against unchecked prosperity, asking: "Or did it, on the other hand, just reassure us that all is well, that everything is all right, that everyone is prosperous and safe, that no great decisions are required of us, and that even the Presidency of the United States has somehow become an easy job" (33)? This quote demonstrates Stevenson's ideal presidency as the ultimate hard labor, part of the Puritan myth of America, where suffering and endurance are equated with high ideals. Drawing a line in the sand against those looking for preservation of the status quo, he declared, "our objectives are not for the timid" (23). Stevenson's convention speech showed him dualistically marking clear differences between what is morally right and wrong in the New America.

Wasted opportunity was a moral theme of significant importance to Stevenson. He argued: "We chat complacently of this and that while, in Carlyle's phrase, 'Death and eternity sit glaring.' And I could add that opportunity, neglected opportunity, sits glaring too!" (47) In the jeremiad's tradition, he lays out a series of truths that exposed the wasted path America has chosen, characterizing the Eisenhower days as an "interval of marking time and of aimless drifting" (18). This litany of truths formed the New America platform. He debunked, very specifically, the myth of equal prosperity by invoking poverty as a driving force to action for the Democratic Party. The inequity of race in the United States represented another key plank in the New America, surfacing in Stevenson's indictment of Eisenhower-era inequality, and the country's need to see that "freedom is made real for all without regard to race or belief or economic condition" (20).

Stevenson's stark list of truths also targeted the international stage as well. He dispensed with verbal courtesies, bluntly stating: "The truth is not that we are winning the cold war. The truth is that we are losing the cold war" (46). Contrasting Eisenhower's claim that America's "prestige since the last world war has never been as high as it is

this day" (44), Stevenson countered that "the truth is that it has probably never been lower" (44). He also referred to imperiled security in the world where men "solve their differences by killing each other" (21). These statements marked a choice by Stevenson to challenge Eisenhower's stranglehold on public opinion and Cold War certainties. He appealed to the sense of collective security in his audience and implied that they should not sit idly.

In addition to the domestic material problems and Cold War security failures in Stevenson's portrait of Eisenhower, there was an implied dearth of morality and spiritual fulfillment. At one point in the address, Stevenson used a call and response method to ask his audience a series of questions about wasted opportunity: "Has the Eisenhower Administration used this opportunity to elevate us? To enlighten us? To inspire us" (32)? After each question, the audience cried, "No!," as if Stevenson was a preacher in front of a fevered congregation (32).<sup>63</sup> This expectation that politics should inspire the individual to a higher devotion served as a fulcrum of Stevenson's rhetoric in general, but was particularly crucial to the vision of the "New America" speech. In a time of peace and prosperity, Stevenson claimed that the government cannot stop there, but has the moral responsibility to challenge its citizens to live a better life. As he remarked, "There is a spiritual hunger in the world today and it cannot be satisfied by material things alone—by better cars on longer credit terms. Our forebears came here to worship God. We must not let our aspirations so diminish that our worship becomes rather the material achievements of bigness" (62). Stevenson's connection to the tradition of the jeremiad was explicit here, evoking his Puritan forbears and reminding his audience of the nation's spiritual roots. Like the Puritan preachers, he implored his audience to aspire to something greater than itself, and to enter into a renewed covenant against the sins of materialism.

Finally, Stevenson acknowledged that the Democratic Party of the New Deal no longer existed and that a replacement was needed to fit Cold War realities. Like all jeremiads, Stevenson's address indicated a new path away from the wayward choices of the past. Stevenson pointed out that "This is the age of abundance! Never in history has there been such an opportunity to show what we can do to improve the quality of living now that the old, terrible, grinding anxieties of daily bread, shelter, and raiment are disappearing" (53). A "glorious triumph over depression" (17) took place and now a new reality faced a changing party. Stevenson's case against complacency not only included his opponents, but his own party as well. The jeremiad preacher seeks to indict the foibles of his own congregation, and in this case, Stevenson was looking at the soul of his Democratic Party. Significantly, he furthered the decisive break from the New Deal by railing against the Republican Party's adoption of many New Deal principles:

I will have to confess that the Republican Administration has performed a minor miracle—after 20 years of incessant damnation of the New Deal they not only haven't repealed it, but they have swallowed it (34)...I suppose we should be thankful that they have caught up with the New Deal at last, but what have they done to take advantage of the great opportunities of these times—a generation after the New Deal? (35) Well, I say they have smothered us in smiles and

complacency while our social and economic advancement has ground to a halt...(36)

Here, Stevenson strategically showed the need for the New America by accusing his opponents of stealing and corrupting the spirit of the New Deal. This perversion of the old path is contrasted with the moral urgency of the new path, fitting once again into the jeremiad framework.

Stevenson's sketch of the dark underbelly of the prosperous Eisenhower years is colored by the themes of stagnation, material inequities, security challenges, spiritual bankruptcy, and the perversion of a New Deal mentality. Each of these is used by Stevenson to create a perceived need for change. As Ritter noted in his study, "in America the jeremiad still thrives upon an inconsistency between the ideal and the real."<sup>64</sup> The New America similarly balanced the practical connection to America's real problems and its devotion to the country's future ideals.

#### The Answers of the New America

Stevenson's command of language to connote "action" and "motion" in setting up his New America cannot be ignored. The symbolic uses of "belief," "paths," "roads," and "work" were also major threads throughout the address, just as they were central parts of Stevenson's life. There were many connections to faith in "free democratic processes" and devout belief in "history's headlong course;" such work shows in the constant references to motion and getting "moving again," and the danger of the "great Nation" sleeping or standing still.<sup>65</sup> He also openly worried that, "Our country is stalled on dead center. It's stalled in the middle of the road...while the world goes whirling past us" (47). These devices of motion and the race against time gave the language an inescapable movement, leading the audience member to a belief that they were on the verge of something larger.

In the process of invigorating his case with such racing language, Stevenson also sought to convince America that his vision was truly "new," even if he drew on old concepts treasured in American lore. In his jeremiad-driven balance between the past and future, he put forward what he envisioned was a more moral course. The concept of time represented an essential part of these arguments, as Stevenson declared at various points in the address that "it is time for America to be herself again" (48) and "it is time to listen again to our hearts, to speak again our ideals, to be again our great selves" (62). Especially when speaking of the dangerous forces internationally, he mentioned that the "unrepentant minute once missed, may be missed forever" (58). This theme tied directly into Stevenson's quest to reconstitute American identity, invoking the sense of community Ritter has noted in the jeremiad.<sup>66</sup>

Stevenson also used the abstract concept of "leadership" to define this community. In the section of the speech that laid out his platform, the redirection of prosperity was continually used as a device to represent strong leadership. He began with education as his first idea, continuing his "time" fixation: "With leadership, Democratic leadership, we can do justice to our children, we can repair the ravages of

time and neglect to our schools" (54). The fate of the American worker was mentioned as the next New America policy concern: "With leadership, Democratic leadership, we can restore the vitality of the American family farm. We can preserve the position of small business without injury to the large. We can strengthen labor unions and collective bargaining as vital institutions in a free economy" (55). He even appealed to his audience's ecological concern and connected it to New America leadership: "With leadership, Democratic leadership, we can conserve our resources of land and forest and water and develop them for the benefit of all of our citizens" (56).

The final domestic plank of Stevenson's New America platform involved the pursuit of racial and economic equality on the home front. Stevenson contended that "With leadership, we can rekindle the spirit of liberty emblazoned in the Bill of Rights; we can build this new America where the doors of opportunity are open equally to all—the doors of our factories and the doors of our school rooms" (57). In addition, no small part of the New America program was Stevenson's observation "that the small farmer, the small businessman, the teacher, the white collar worker, the retired citizen trying to pay today's prices on yesterday's pension—all these are in serious trouble" (42). Each of these parts of the new path are contrasted with illustrations of the "serious trouble" facing the nation if it stuck to the old ways, evoking the damnation needed in a jeremiad to bring the congregation towards salvation.

Stevenson's language for his domestic vision also complemented the international scope of the New America program. Time resurfaced once again in his conceptions of reversing the damage of Eisenhower's Cold War: "Here more than anywhere guidance and illumination are needed in the terrifying century of the hydrogen bomb. Here more than anywhere we must move, and rapidly, to repair the ravages of the past four years to America's repute and influence abroad" (58). His break from the stagnancy of the Eisenhower leadership was visible in his plea that "We must protect the new nations in the exercise of their full independence; and we must help other people out of Communist or colonial servitude along the hard road to freedom" (60). Stevenson's choice of urgent and unequivocal language, once again, supported the jeremiad's reliance on unwavering spiritual conviction. Such language is evidenced by his definition of foreign policy for the New America in what he terms "the struggle for peace," defining peace as not a vision but an "absolute, imperative, practical necessity" (61) in the nuclear age. And the recognition of developing countries' strategic importance in the fight against Communism was no small part of this practical peace—a concept that would capture Democratic minds in the coming decade.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the close of Stevenson's platform for the New America left the realm of policy and turned back toward the concept of individual responsibility and spirituality. The prophetic tone had been maintained throughout, and here he was setting up the familiar convention of the jeremiad: the portrait of a "chosen people." He remarked near the close of his speech: "Once we were not ashamed to be idealists. Once we were proud to confess that an American is a man who wants peace and believes in a better future and loves his fellow man...We must dare to say that the American cause is the cause of all mankind" (65). Stevenson's convention address even ended with a sung recitation of the Lord's Prayer by Mahalia Jackson, making explicit his moral cause with

the Democratic delegates.<sup>68</sup> So, beyond the call for this new forward-thinking of wealth distribution, racial equality, and international battles to uphold peace, Adlai Stevenson was also calling for a personal return to an "Old America" with his emotional appeals to history and spirituality, a staple of the Puritan jeremiad.

*"The Fork of History": Legacies of the New America*

The legacy of both the ideas and the moral language that constituted Adlai Stevenson's New America justifies a re-evaluation of the 1956 Democratic convention speech. At the close of the address, Adlai Stevenson established a covenant with his audience, "standing as we do here tonight at this great watershed, this great fork of history" (65). So, what path did Stevenson's legacy follow at this fork of history? What were the long-term ramifications of his address?

At the time of its utterance, much of the coverage of Stevenson's speech expressed admiration for Stevenson's fighting words, yet wondered aloud if the New America could break the spell of his opponent. The *Christian Science Monitor* commented that, "Mr. Stevenson is well equipped to challenge citizens to think about such things as preparing too slothfully for crises which lie ahead.... But the problem for him in this campaign is to offer specific remedies for crises which to most Americans are not yet visible."<sup>69</sup> A *Baltimore Sun* editorial expressed a similar ambivalence, calling the address a "high-minded and graceful statement of new Democratic ends. About the means to those ends Mr. Stevenson had less to say."<sup>70</sup> And, perhaps most damningly, Walter Lippmann, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, went so far as to say that "The keynote speech...had no visible connection with what Stevenson is and with the way Stevenson deals with political affairs."<sup>71</sup>

Such consistent ambivalence coupled with Stevenson's ensuing defeat to ensure that the 1956 convention speech was dubbed a rhetorical and political failure. Over time, the address became grossly overshadowed by Stevenson's much more famous 1952 convention address and is rarely mentioned in biographies; most critical analyses of his rhetoric either ignore it entirely or use it as a footnote for the botched 1956 campaign. Yet, still, the "New America" speech retained a sense of principled eloquence that seemed to stand on its own in Adlai Stevenson's canon, daring to make a potentially unpopular moral critique of a seemingly prosperous nation. And while Stevenson's moral rhetoric in the speech may have contributed to his unelectable image and may have rang hollow in the ears of influential journalists like Lippmann, the 1956 convention address featured a more longitudinal view that was rather unique for Stevenson. His fiery moral tone combined with a focused, policy-centered platform that his Party would adopt as its foundation in the post-Eisenhower era.

As Ritter pointed out, the prophets of Jeremiah's time were literally voices in the wilderness, standing apart from society. But in the American Puritan tradition, the prophets of today function within society and are at the heart of the political and social order.<sup>72</sup> Even if Stevenson was not chosen to lead, his ideas lived on as prophecy for his country. For example, the two issues of foreign policy that were said to have doomed his candidacy came to the fore shortly after the election: the military draft and the

dismantling of the H-bomb. In May 1957, a Pentagon task force endorsed an all-volunteer army, which would later become reality under Nixon. And in October 1958, Eisenhower announced a moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and initiated negotiations for the eventual Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.<sup>73</sup> While these advancements cannot be traced directly back to Stevenson's discourse, by sampling a few of the seminal texts of the leadership from Kennedy and Johnson, we can see how the platform of the New America lived on in the 1960s.<sup>74</sup>

Ritter cites John F. Kennedy's famed 1960 Democratic acceptance speech as a modern jeremiad.<sup>75</sup> The New Frontier was the path that JFK offered his audience, and much of his domestic and foreign program resembled Stevenson's New America. In Los Angeles on August 1, 1960, Kennedy offered both moral and material ideas for his candidacy, and like Stevenson, he described prosperity as a double-edged sword:

Our task is not merely one of itemizing Republican failures, nor is that wholly necessary. For the families forced from the farm will know how to vote without our telling them. The unemployed miners and textile workers will know how to vote. The old people without medical care—the families without a decent home—the parents of children without adequate food or schools—they all know that it's time for a change.<sup>76</sup>

In itemizing farming concerns, urban squalor, education, racial discrimination, and the inequities of the elderly, JFK echoed Stevenson's distancing of his New America from the New Deal. Kennedy noted: "Here at home, the changing fact of the future is equally revolutionary. The New Deal and the Fair Deal were bold measures for their generations—but this is a new generation."<sup>77</sup>

The international tenets of Kennedy's New Frontier also followed Stevenson's lead in advocating active efforts to liberate nations from communism:

Abroad, the balance of power is shifting. There are new and more terrible weapons—new and uncertain nations—new pressures of population and deprivation. One-third of the world, it has been said, may be free—but one-third is the victim of cruel repression—and the other one-third is rocked by the pangs of poverty, hunger and envy. More energy is released by the awakening of these new nations than by the fission of the atom itself.<sup>78</sup>

Kennedy, like Stevenson, called for correcting the imbalance of American prosperity in the foreign arena, and he questioned the morality of creating more weaponry. JFK's Inaugural Address, on January 20, 1961, continued these themes of liberation. Reminiscent of the New America, Kennedy spoke directly to an international audience:

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny....If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.<sup>79</sup>



JFK's liberalism worked to rhetorically energize the 1960s, expressing Stevenson's framework for the Cold War, reinforcing that the burden of action rested on the shoulders of those who possessed the means.

While Kennedy's New Frontier shared a discursive similarity with Stevenson's New America, LBJ's Great Society brought many of Stevenson's ideas to actual fruition. In Johnson's 1964 acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, he argued, "the ultimate test of our faithfulness to our past has not been our goods and has not been our guns. It is the quality of our people's lives."<sup>80</sup> As Glenn Capp would note, the philosophy of the Great Society envisioned reaching this standard of quality by properly using America's abundance.<sup>81</sup> Stevenson, of course, had made this prosperity argument central to his New America platform eight years earlier.

Johnson's commencement address at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964, has been recognized as the official debut of the Great Society, with its tri-fold focus on the city, the countryside, and the classroom. On the classroom issues, LBJ followed the reform ideas of the New America, with his quest to right the inequities: "We must give every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn from. Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from poverty."<sup>82</sup> Johnson also marked the "eroding of precious and time-honored values of community with neighbors" inside the increasingly crowded urban landscapes.<sup>83</sup> Similar warnings about inequities and the loss of values were issued by Stevenson in his 1956 address, where he posited that the "ravages of time and neglect" (54) to schools were an injustice to our children's future, and hence, our country's future. Stevenson also worried that the struggles of the family farmer during the seemingly prosperous 1950s, when cities and suburbs were growing exponentially, was an example of how America had lost a sense of its priorities and its ideals of simplicity and community. In addition, Stevenson's treatment of the race issue in his convention speech, where he called for a non-discriminating "New America" on the basis of race and argued for the Party to "speak responsibly and responsively in both the North and the South" on issues of desegregation (25), also resurfaced in the Great Society. When signing the Voting Rights Act speech of 1965, LBJ remarked:

The struggle for equality must now move to a different battlefield. It is nothing less than granting every American Negro his freedom to enter the mainstream of American life....For it is not enough just to give men rights; they must be able to use those rights in their personal pursuit of happiness.<sup>84</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Adlai Stevenson's New America sought to enable Americans to make this personal pursuit and follow their own moral path through the rhetorical strategies of the jeremiad. His essential ideas on how to reach this path, which surfaced so boldly in the Democratic rise to power in the 1960s, were given voice during an exhausting and un-winnable campaign, and expressed in a speech that has largely been ignored. In

retrospect, however, we see the legacy of Stevenson's at work in the rhetoric of those Democrats elevated to the office of the presidency in the 1960s. As Porter McKeever noted about the legacy of the New America:

When Stevenson advocated federal aid to education, it was regarded as heresy. Proposals in the field of health care that were derided as fanciful in 1956 became Medicare in the 1960s. His call for the end of the military draft, for which he was harshly ridiculed, was enacted and signed into law by the very people who ridiculed him for proposing it. His advocacy of the nuclear test-ban treaty helped to defeat him in 1956, but in the 1960s he had the satisfaction of being in Moscow for its signing.<sup>85</sup>

Beyond igniting the new liberalism of the 1960s, Adlai Stevenson's New America still provides political lessons for today. Without question, some of these lessons stem from Stevenson's political failures. As Senator John Kerry experienced, intellectual nuance can still be a scarlet letter in a political campaign, showing how Stevenson's "eggheaded" rhetoric still casts a dark shadow. In addition, political candidates now face even larger obstacles of image-construction and single-issue politics than those Stevenson fought so fruitlessly against. Yet, as the forgotten legacy of the New America proves, a restructuring of ideas and moral conviction can prove immensely influential, even if political success is not immediately apparent.

The Democratic Party is at a crossroads similar to what Stevenson saw before him in 1956. Despite recent setbacks, President Bush remains a formidable political force against a Democratic establishment that is trying to redefine its identity. Like Stevenson waving goodbye to the New Deal, Democrats are still looking for a way to move out of Bill Clinton's shadow. And like the Cold War Republicans, the Bush administration hinges its popularity on a tough and unwavering foreign policy, while successfully redirecting attention away from some of its failed domestic initiations.

Stevenson sought to shake America out of its complacency and to help it realize that a stalemate in international affairs was damaging its global reputation. Simultaneously, he provided a clear domestic policy focused on redistributing prosperity in classrooms, nursing homes, and farms. In the end, Stevenson himself failed to disrupt the status quo, but his body of ideas energized a confused and static party. America's most famous egghead, when he closed his last major speech before the Democratic convention, said "Goodbye and I hope we can meet again in every town and village of America" (68). While the journey would take longer than he thought, perhaps he made it there after all, through the principles he left behind for his party and country.

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### Notes

1 Michael H. Prosser, ed., "Introduction," in *An Ethic for Survival: Adlai Stevenson Speaks on International Affairs 1936–1965* (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1969), 19.

2 Edward P. Doyle, ed., *As We Knew Adlai: The Stevenson Story by Twenty-Two Friends* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), photo inset.

3 Douglas Slaybaugh, "Adlai Stevenson, Television, and the Presidential Campaign of 1956," *Illinois Historical Journal* (Spring 1996): 3.

4 "Editorial: A True American," *The Times*, July 15, 1965, 11; James Reston, "Right Man, Wrong Time," *New York Times*, July 15, 1965, 1. See an account of these stories and others surrounding the death and legacy of Adlai Stevenson in: Alden Whitman and the *New York Times*, *Portrait: Adlai Stevenson: Politician, Diplomat, Friend* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 257–82.

5 Irving Howe, *Steady Work: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism 1953-1966* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 222. Also, for more comments on Stevenson's "tragic" legacy, see: Rodney M. Sievers, *The Last Puritan? Adlai Stevenson in American Politics* (Port Washington, NY: Associated Faculty Press, 1983), xi.

6 James Reston, *New York Times*, July 15, 1965, 1; "The Legacy of Adlai Stevenson," *New York Times*, July 18, 1965, Section 4, 8E.

7 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Seymour E. Harris, "Introduction," in *The New America*, eds., Seymour E. Harris, John Bartlow Martin, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1957), xxix.

8 Herbert J. Muller, *Adlai Stevenson: A Study in Values* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 178.

9 Richard Murphy, "Adlai E. Stevenson: Part I. Stevenson as Spokesman," *Today's Speech* 8 (February 1960): 4.

10 Whitman, *Portrait*, 116–117.

11 Porter McKeever, *Adlai Stevenson: His Life and Legacy* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), 49; Adlai E. Stevenson, *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson 1952* (New York: Random House, 1953), xvi – xvii.

12 Adlai E. Stevenson, *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson 1952* (New York: Random House, 1953), xvii.

13 Adlai E. Stevenson, *An Ethic for Survival: Adlai Stevenson Speaks on International Affairs 1936–1965*, ed., Michael H. Prosser (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1969), 64.

14 Prosser, "UNO Gets Under Way," in *An Ethic for Survival*, 62.

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15 Stevenson, *Major Campaign Speeches*, xx.

16 Ibid., xx–xxi.

17 Walter Johnson, *How We Drafted Adlai Stevenson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), vii, 5.

18 John M. Murphy, "Civic Republicanism in the Modern Age: Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 Presidential Campaign," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 318.

19 Ibid., 317.

20 Ibid., 318.

21 Many of the journalists, writers, and scholars who have written on Stevenson have singled out this acceptance speech from July 26, 1952, as particularly noteworthy to American public address as a whole. For example, one of Stevenson's biographers, Stuart Gerry Brown, referred to the speech as one of the "masterpieces of American political oratory." Also, in a 1978 *Speech Education* article, Takano Sano singled out the convention speech as a piece of "superb craftsmanship" that deserved analysis in the speech classroom. Recently, Penguin Books also chose the speech for its popular, widely-published paperback anthology of prominent twentieth-century speeches. See: Stuart Gerry Brown, *Adlai Stevenson: A Short Biography* (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Woodbury Press, 1965), 88; Takano Sano, "A Rhetoric of Superb Craftsmanship: A Stylistic Analysis of Adlai E. Stevenson's 1952 Campaign Speeches," *Speech Education* 6, no. 1 (July 1978): 80–87; Alden Whitman and the *New York Times*, *Portrait: Adlai Stevenson: Politician, Diplomat, Friend* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 62; Adlai Stevenson, "Let's Talk Sense to the American People," in *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-Century Speeches*, ed., Brian MacArthur (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 251–253. For similar appraisals of the 1952 Democratic convention speech, see: McKeever, *Adlai Stevenson: His Life and Legacy*, 200–01; Bert Cochran, *Adlai Stevenson: Patrician Among the Politicians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969), 198; John Sparkman, "Let's Talk Sense to the American People," in *As We Knew Adlai: The Stevenson Story by Twenty-Two Friends*, ed. Edward P. Doyle (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 118.

22 Adlai E. Stevenson, "Speech of Acceptance Democratic National Convention, Chicago, Illinois, July 26, 1952," *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson 1952* (New York: Random House, 1953), 9.

23 Ibid., 10.

24 In the 1952 campaign, Eisenhower received 33,936,234 popular votes to Stevenson's 27,314,992, the largest of any defeated presidential candidate. Stevenson was crushed, however, in the Electoral College, with 89 votes to Eisenhower's 442, carrying only 9 states. See: McKeever, *Adlai Stevenson: His Life and Legacy*, 262. In the 1956 election, Eisenhower swept 41 states with a popular vote of 35,590,472 and an electoral vote of 457, while Stevenson took 7 states with a popular vote of 26,029,752 and an electoral vote of 73. For more details, see: Charles A.H. Thomson, and Frances M. Shattuck, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1960), 345–354.

25 Whitman, *Portrait*, 4.

26 Adlai E. Stevenson, *What I Think* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1956), ix–x.

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27 Russel Windes, Jr. and James A. Robinson, "Public Address in the Career of Adlai E. Stevenson," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 42 (October 1956): 227.

28 Whitman, *Portrait*, 116. In a two page spread in *The New York Times* on March 14, 1954, under the headline "Turn of Tide?," the article recounted Stevenson's speech in Miami against McCarthy where Stevenson asked, "Why have the demagogues triumphed so often? The answer is inescapable: because a group of political plungers has persuaded the President that McCarthyism is the best Republican formula for political success. A political party divided, half McCarthy and half Eisenhower, cannot produce national unity." (See: "Turn of Tide?," *New York Times*, March 15, 1954, E1-E2. The article also features an exploration of a series of anti-McCarthy events over the course of the previous week, including Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* condemnation of Senator McCarthy). A letter to the editor in *The Times* also addressed Stevenson's speech, noting that, "All of us—Republicans and Democrats alike—must extend profound thanks to Adlai Stevenson for touching off in his Miami speech the series of events that mark the beginning of the end of the McCarthy menace to this country." As evidenced by such letters and headlines, he remained politically relevant after the landslide defeat. And this rhetoric of a Republican "house divided" would resurface directly in the "New America" convention address two years later. (See: Jennie House, "Letters to the Times: End of McCarthy Menace Foreseen," *New York Times*, March 15, 1954, 24).

29 Prosser, "Introduction," in *An Ethic for Survival*, 22.

30 Adlai E. Stevenson, *The Papers of Adlai Stevenson: Volume IV*, ed., Walter Johnson (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 591-592.

31 *Ibid.*, 592.

32 Adlai E. Stevenson, *The Papers of Adlai Stevenson: Volume VI*, ed., Walter Johnson (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 261.

33 *Ibid.*, 261.

34 Schlesinger and Harris, "Introduction," xxix-xxx.

35 Sievers, *The Last Puritan?*, 11.

36 Whitman, *Portrait*, 120.

37 Prosser, "H-Bomb, Defense and Foreign Policy," in *An Ethic for Survival*, 220.

38 Stevenson, "H-Bomb, Defense and Foreign Policy," in *An Ethic for Survival*, 222-234.

39 Schlesinger and Harris, "Introduction," xvi.

40 Brown, *Adlai Stevenson: A Short Biography*, 142.

41 Porter McKeever, "Adlai Stevenson and the Campaigns of 1952 and 1956," in *Lessons from Defeated Presidential Candidates*, ed., Kenneth Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 119-20.

42 Schlesinger and Harris, "Introduction," xix.

43 *Ibid.*, xxvi.

44 Russel R. Windes, Jr., "Adlai E. Stevenson's Speech Staff in the 1956 Campaign," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46 (February 1960): 42.

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45 Lois J. Einhorn, "The Ghosts Talk: Personal Interviews with Three Former Speechwriters," *Communication Quarterly* 36 (1988): 97.

46 McKeever, *Lessons From Defeated Presidential Candidates*, 127.

47 Russel R. Windes, Jr., "A Study of Effective and Ineffective Presidential Campaign Speaking," *Speech Monographs* 28 (March 1961): 48.

48 McKeever, *Lessons From Defeated Presidential Candidates*, 123.

49 Slaybaugh, "Adlai Stevenson and Television," 8.

50 Adlai E. Stevenson, "Author's Note," in *The New America*, ed., Seymour E. Harris, John Bartlow Martin, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1957).

51 Murphy, "Civic Republicanism," 313–328.

52 Jeff Broadwater, *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics: The Odyssey of a Cold War Liberal* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 165.

53 Schlesinger and Harris, "Introduction," xvi.

54 *Ibid.*, xvi.

55 This point alludes to the success of Senator Joseph McCarthy's attempts to undermine the Democratic Party during his new "Red Scare" of the early 1950s. McCarthy, particularly in the 1952 campaign, was able to paint the Democratic Party as weak on foreign policy, insinuating that many public officials in the Truman administration were Communist sympathizers. While McCarthy was publicly disgraced by the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, his legacy of portraying Democrats as "soft" continued, as Stevenson's campaign underestimated in its military draft and H-bomb positions.

56 All of the passages from Stevenson's October 17, 1956, speech of acceptance at the Democratic National Convention are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the speech that accompanies this essay.

57 Rodney M. Sievers, *The Last Puritan? Adlai Stevenson in American Politics* (Port Washington, NY: Associated Faculty Press, 1983).

58 Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 47.

59 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 8.

60 Kurt W. Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric and the Jeremiad Tradition: Presidential Nomination Acceptance Addresses, 1960–1976," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (Fall 1980): 159.

61 *Ibid.*, 160.

62 *Ibid.*, 167.

63 The audience responses of "No!" to Stevenson's questions are indicated in the copy text. Follow the link for the copy text in order to see the exact places where the audience audibly answers Stevenson's rhetorical questions.

64 Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric," 168.

65 Adlai Stevenson, "Address of the Honorable Adlai E. Stevenson Accepting the Nomination for the Presidency of the United States," *Official Proceedings of the*

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*Democratic National Convention 1956*, Democratic National Committee (Richmond, VA: Beacon Press, Inc, 1956), 505, 508.

66 Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric," 169.

67 Joshua Freed, *Allies of Convenience: The Political Relationship of Adlai and JFK*, PhD diss. (University of Maryland, 1997): 55.

68 *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention*, 511.

69 "Democrats in Battle Array," *Christian Science Monitor*, Saturday, August 18, 1956, 20.

70 "The Acceptance Address," *The Baltimore Sun*, Saturday, August 18, 1956, editorial.

71 Walter Lippmann, "Today and Tomorrow," *New York Herald Tribune*, Saturday, August 18, 1956, 8.

72 Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric," 161.

73 Broadwater, *Odyssey of a Cold War Liberal*, 172-173.

74 McKeever, *Lessons From Defeated Presidential Candidates*, 126.

75 Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric," 159.

76 John F. Kennedy, "The Democratic National Convention Acceptance Address," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 26, no. 20 (August 1, 1960): 611.

77 *Ibid.*, 611.

78 *Ibid.*, 611.

79 John F. Kennedy, "For the Freedom of Man," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 27, no. 8 (February 1, 1961): 226.

80 Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric," 166.

81 Glenn Capp, "Origin, Development, Analysis," in *Great Society: A Sourcebook of Speeches*, ed., Glenn Capp (Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1967), 2.

82 Lyndon B. Johnson, "University of Michigan Commencement Address," in *Great Society: A Sourcebook of Speeches*, ed., Glenn R. Capp (Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1967), 18.

83 *Ibid.*, 19.

84 Lyndon B. Johnson, "The Voting Rights Law of 1965—A Victory for Freedom," in *Great Society: A Sourcebook of Speeches*, ed., Glenn R. Capp (Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1967), 102.

85 McKeever, *Lessons From Defeated Presidential Candidates*, 126. In addition, on the day after Stevenson's death, the *Times* of London pointed out the test ban's eventual passing as one of Stevenson's most concrete legacies, despite his campaign defeats, suggesting that his unpopular calling for an end to testing in the campaign of 1956 may have been ahead of its time. See: "Difficult to Fill Gap at U.N.," *The Times*, July 15, 1965, 10.