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Political Verbal Behavior

Paul Richard Shukovsky

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POLITICAL VERBAL BEHAVIOR

by

Paul Richard Shukovsky

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

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Paul Richard Shukovsky
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A popular, republican form of government requires that there be a close relationship between the leaders and the people (Cornwell, 1965, p. 3). A large portion of the power of the Presidency of the United States is derived from the support of the people. Indeed, this relationship is institutionalized through constitutional mandate. The very document that heralded the beginning of the United States declares that "... governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . ." (Declaration of Independence). The power of the Presidency depends on the ability of the office holders to shape public opinion, attitudes and other forms of behavior (Cornwell, 1965, p. 6). The major technique of the President to affect the behavior of the populace is through the mass media. Thus, the President of the United States is by necessity a behavior modifier. Behavior modification has been defined as consisting of "... efforts to change social institutions or groups of individuals without regard to their individual learning histories or areas of behavioral assets and liabilities (deficits or excesses)." (Franzini and Tilker, 1972, p. 281).
The purpose of this thesis is to conceptualize mass political propaganda through the use of learning theory. This thesis is not intended to be a decisive analysis of President Nixon's propaganda messages. Nixon is merely a relevant example of the way in which the principles discussed here can be utilized.

It is essential to realize that it is irrelevant whether Nixon purposefully designs his speeches with behavior modification in mind or not. It does not matter whether his verbal behavior is a product of his subconscious or is an accident of random words. His motivations are not in question. Rather, this paper is concerned with the analysis of political verbal behavior, using the President as an example.

The term verbal behavior, as used here, simply means a "... behavior reinforced through the mediation of other persons. ..." (Skinner, 1957, p. 14). Although Skinner's preceding definition does not specify any single mode, form or medium, this thesis is limited to vocal and textual behavior within the context of the mass media of communication. Special recognition should be given to the fact that many of the principles developed here are the direct result of those delineated in Skinner's book, *Verbal Behavior*.

This is a nonexperimental study. Certain inferences will be made that are not based upon exact
experimental results. However, this thesis will be based firmly upon the lawful principles that have been discovered through experimental analysis.

This thesis is written in accordance with the style of the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association, 1967 Revision*. 
THE MAND

The mand is a Skinnerian verbal construct involving a response that is characteristically consequated in a certain way. If this consequation is rewarding, the probability of the response occurring again is increased (Skinner, 1957, p. 35). It is clear that the response is under the control of conditions of aversive stimulation or deprivation.

If a speaker says the mand, "water," to a listener, the listener characteristically consequates the speaker's behavior by the presentation of water. Therefore, the behavior of the speaker is strengthened by the positive reinforcement of water. The listener's behavior is reinforced by the withdrawal of the threatening imperative characteristics of the speaker's statement. The listener may also be reinforced by the words "thank you."

An example of Mr. Nixon's use of mands can be seen in the following statement, which he made during an address called One America, made over nationwide radio on October 28, 1972.

"And I urge each of you - whether you are a Democrat, a Republican, or an independent - to become a part of the New American Majority. . . ."
In this statement Nixon uses a mand to command Americans to join the New American Majority. The mand has a slightly cloaked character which can be seen in the use of the word "urge" rather than a more imperative form.

The mand has certain unique characteristics that can prove both useful and a hindrance to the mass communicator interested in controlling the behavior of his audience (Skinner, 1957, p. 36). Among these characteristics is that a mand tends to specify the response of the listener. This becomes particularly evident in a political speech where a politician mands the public by saying, "vote for me." This statement specifies the precise behavior required of the listener. The use of this statement also has political drawbacks in that it is obvious that the primary recipient of positive reinforcement is the politician. There is also less of a chance of provoking a hostile response with a request as opposed to an overt command. Thus, the politician cloaks the true nature of the mand through various devices (Skinner, 1957, p. 41). This situation is reflected in a speech made by President Nixon on October 16, 1972, which was picked up by the national news media. The following is an excerpt from that speech.
"... of all the many groups I speak to and that I have spoken to, big or small, across America, there isn't one that inspires me more than you do. Two, I am here to thank you for your support and to urge you for your continued support. I am not speaking of an election campaign, but I am speaking of support for a cause bigger than an election, a cause of an honorable peace, one that will contribute to peace in the world."¹

Lines one through four represent an attempt to heighten, through the use of contingent reinforcement, the probability of the desired response being emitted (Skinner, 1957, p. 41). This sentence may be read as saying: You are only inspiring if you support me. This is immediately followed up with further positive reinforcement, as delineated in line five where Nixon expresses thanks for their support. Lines five and six are the heart of the mand. At this point, the President delivers to the audience an explicit verbal discriminative stimulus and an implicit aversive stimulus. The threat becomes clear in lines eight through eleven where Mr. Nixon implies that if he does not receive the

¹This proclamation as well as all other Presidential material to be quoted is extracted from a United States government General Services Administration publication called Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.
support he mands, there will be no honorable peace in
the world. The verbal discriminative stimulus provides
the audience with the correct response to remove the
aversive stimulation. The response, of course, is to
give Mr. Nixon their support. This response reinforces
Mr. Nixon's verbal behavior and simultaneously removes
the aversive stimulation. The removal of the aversive
stimulation acts as a negative reinforcer for the
audience behavior of giving support. Furthermore, once
support is given, those lines that were previously
threatening become positively reinforcing. In other
words, not supporting Nixon carries aversive consequences,
while supporting him results in a world at peace. The
President cloaks the imperative nature of his mand by
using the word support instead of a grammatically more
imperative form such as vote for me. He further counters
the tendency of people to rebel in the face of mands by
including a disclaimer of any attempt on his part to
gain positive reinforcement (Skinner, 1957, p. 41).
This is graphically illustrated in lines seven through
eleven.

It is important to state at this time that it is
virtually irrelevant whether or not Nixon is sincere in
this speech. What is relevant here is the behavioral
effect of his statements. Briefly stated, it is not
what one means, it is what one says that counts.
This analysis can be conveniently diagrammed through a procedure delineated by Skinner (1957, p. 38). The arrows indicate the direction of a stimulus. They show who emitted the stimulus and who receives it. The abbreviations, $S^D$, $R$, $S^A$, $S^+$, $S^-$, and $-$, indicate a discriminative stimulus, a response, an aversive stimulus, a positively reinforcing stimulus, a negative reinforcing stimulus and removing of a stimulus, respectively (see Figure 1).
Figure 1

- Nixon says: "...inspiring... urge... thank... not speaking... peace..."
- Listener: +S
- Threat withdrawn

- Audience: 5(S
- Not rebelling, no support after support is given

S

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Other Types of Mands

Although mands as seen in political propaganda are generally in the form of cloaked imperatives containing aversive or threatening stimulation, there are other types of mands. A mand may come in the form of a request, a question, advice or a warning (Skinner, 1957, p. 40). Such forms may contain very mild aversion. However, the most effective mand in the mass media situation is one that contains significant aversive stimulation. This is because responding to mands containing aversive stimulation has been conditioned through some form of punishment when a response has not been given. Thus, the audience has learned to respond to the mand as a form, regardless of the specific reinforcing properties of the particular mand (Skinner, 1957, p. 43). It is important to remember that a mand is a construct involving a response that is characteristically consequated in a particular way, and in which there is little stimulus control. The response is under the control of deprivation or aversion.

Problems Relating to the Mass Media Situation

The mand was developed primarily to explain verbal interactions on a face to face level. Therefore, it may appear that there are certain problems in extending the construct to mass media situations. Problems that come
immediately to mind are those of immediacy of consequation and the lack of feedback between speaker and audience. To deal with these problems, let us return to our example of Mr. Nixon's verbal behavior on pages three and four. It is clear that the President handles the immediacy of consequation problem by clearly indicating that positive consequation is contingent upon support, and aversive consequation is contingent on the withholding of support. As soon as the listener makes a decision, he knows what consequences will occur. Although the actual consequating events have not yet occurred in all cases, the words themselves act as effective stimuli capable of strengthening or weakening the probability of behavior. That words have this capability has been established by several researchers (Brotsky, 1968; Finley, 1967; Hall, 1967; Hekmat & Vanian, 1971; Krasner, 1958; Phillips, 1958; Scott, 1957; Sherman, 1964; Staats, 1972; Weiss, 1962).

In face to face interaction, the participants receive immediate feedback as to the response of the other individual involved. This allows the participants to determine if the responses received are desirable or undesirable, and therefore whether they should be reinforced or punished. In the case of a mand, it allows the speaker to determine if negative reinforcement should be delivered by the removal of aversive
stimulation. The mass media situation does not allow immediate feedback. Therefore, it is necessary for the speaker to design the message in such a way as to reduce the need for feedback. This is clearly illustrated once more, in the use of contingent consequation. The President's speech is designed so that responses are automatically consequated in the proper manner. That is, you are inspiring only if you support me, I thank you only if you support me, if you support me there will be peace, if you don't there will be no peace.

It is probably true that communication via mass media cannot be as effective as face to face communication in producing behavior change. A major reason for this is that face to face interactions allow the participants to use highly individualized, and thus more effective consequation. However, a subtly cloaked, well designed mand, where the contingencies of consequation are clearly outlined, can be an effective tool for the modification of behavior.
Skinner (1957, p. 82) defines the tact as "... a verbal operant in which a response of a given form is evoked (or at least strengthened) by a particular object or event or property of an object or event." He goes on to say that the essence of a tact is "... that the presence of a given stimulus raises the probability of occurrence of a given form of response." (Skinner, 1957, p. 83). The key point here is that the tact is under very strong stimulus control. A discriminative stimulus is given control by consistent reinforcement of the response, in the presence of the stimulus with a wide range of reinforcers (Skinner, 1957, p. 83).

A common example of a tact is a school bell that signals the end of class periods. The bell provides a discriminative stimuli for the listeners' behavior of getting up out of their seats and walking to the next class. The reinforcement comes from many possible sources. It may be seen as a release from a long class which is negative reinforcement, or the positive reinforcement of walking or taking a breather. The most important point here is that the bell has strong stimulus control over the response.
The use of tacts by President Nixon is clearly seen in the following sentence spoken during his speech on August 23, 1972 in which he accepted the nomination of the Republican Party for the Presidency.

"This Nation proudly calls itself the United States of America." When Nixon presents the stimuli of the words in this sentence such as "Nation," "proudly," and "U.S.A.," the people who are listening respond to these discriminative stimuli just as the students respond to the class bell.

In a face to face situation, the tact is reinforced through verbal approval. The tact may also reinforce the listener by means of the information which he receives (Skinner, 1957, p. 85). Skinner refers to this when he says that the tact may be said to work for the benefit of the listener by extending his contact with the environment. While both of these reinforcing characteristics of the tact are still operative in the mass media situation, they are by no means as effective as in the face to face situation. This is because the information passed on does not usually have immediate and personal consequences for the audience.

The Generalization of Stimulus Control

How, then, does the President strengthen the behavior of believing that we have achieved a peace with
honor in Vietnam? Nixon gains his control by providing those verbal stimuli which are discriminative for the responses he finds desirable. The responding behavior is maintained and strengthened by the fact that his audience daily engages in large amounts of verbal interactions which involve stimuli that are very similar to the stimuli that the President is using. Therefore, Nixon gains his control by making his verbal behavior as similar as possible to the daily verbal stimuli that already have some measure of discriminative control over certain response classes. The more similar Nixon's verbal discriminative stimuli are to the daily stimuli, the greater stimulus control he will have over his audience. There are several ramifications to this situation. One ramification is that Mr. Nixon must deliver his discriminative stimuli as pure as possible. When Nixon uses the stimulus of prayer, he should realize that he is not inside a church; thus he should avoid presenting the contradictory stimulus of talking about prayer inside his oval office. He may save references to prayer for instances when he is at a prayer breakfast, a convention of the clergy, or when he is playing golf with Billy Graham. Another consideration is that he must avoid the release of information showing that he has behaved in a manner contrary to discriminative stimuli he uses, since he would then run the risk of
differentially conditioning a new response to the stimulus with respect to himself. At the time of this writing, Nixon is currently in a situation with respect to the Watergate affair, which makes it unwise for him to include the issues of crime, and law and order in his verbal repertoire.

Stimulus generalization may be defined as a situation in which a response occurs to a stimulus different from the conditioned stimulus. The amount of generalization that occurs to a specific stimulus is directly proportional to how similar that stimulus is to the originally conditioned stimulus (Skinner, 1957, p. 106). A new stimulus which has some similarity to the conditioned stimulus might evoke a response. The only requirement is that the new stimulus have some characteristic that makes it similar to an already effective stimulus (Skinner, 1957, p. 91). Through a process of gradual introduction of new stimuli that have some common characteristics with the preceding stimuli, Nixon can slowly shape a desired response to previously neutral stimuli. One way to accomplish the extension of stimulus control to a new stimulus is by frequently associating the stimulus to the effective discriminative stimulus. Skinner (1957, p. 100) cites an example with the phrase, the White House, which is used in lieu of the word, President. This can be carried one step further by
pointing out that the word, President, is now used in lieu of the word, Nixon, or even in lieu of the phrase, President Nixon. This can be very valuable in that the word, President, may be a conditioned reinforcer in operant terms or an unconditioned stimulus in the classical conditioning paradigm. Thus, instead of identifying Nixon as Nixon, he can be identified as the President. If Nixon requires a particularly strong response on a certain occasion, he may have himself announced as "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States of America." Such an announcement might elicit a thrilling sensation on the backs of the audience. This sensation would be the result of a Pavlovian conditioning procedure. Nixon's use of these phenomena can be seen in the words, Committee to Re-elect the President and the campaign slogan, Re-elect the President. Supporting the President of the United States is one thing; supporting Richard M. Nixon is another.

Because the original discriminative stimulus has usually been reinforced with either a wide range of different reinforcers or with generalized reinforcement, the tact is very powerful in that the state of the listener at the time of hearing the tact has little effect upon his response to it (Skinner, 1957, p. 90). As has been previously indicated, the response is dependent upon the similarity of the stimulus presented to the original
discriminative stimulus. It is therefore very important how a speech sounds over radio, as well as how the speaker appears on television. If a certain stimulus is presented which has a great deal of control over a certain response, but is presented in an improper manner, it may lose its effectiveness. A smile or light tone of voice during the presentation of a serious discriminative stimulus can destroy stimulus control.

Inappropriate Discriminative Stimuli, Extinction and Schedules

If the public is continually presented with discriminative stimuli for a certain response which is later found to be inappropriate, as can occur when the speaker lies, that speaker is likely to find that he is suffering from a credibility gap, because the audience receives no reinforcement, and perhaps receives punishment. This may be analogous to the strain in responding that develops in the experimental situation when the value of the ratio in a variable ratio schedule is increased too rapidly (Reynolds, 1968, p. 69). As a result, the politician may find himself without the reinforcement he was seeking. This loss of reinforcement may be reflected in the opinion polls or at the voting booths. There are, of course, certain members of the populace capable of being maintained on a very large ratio of consequence.
It is possible that Mr. Nixon may present some inappropriate discriminative stimuli. Those tacts that are inappropriate may only result in occasional punishment. Thus, it is clear that Nixon is maintaining our behavior on a variable schedule. The nature of speeches is such that we probably receive tacts that result in punished responses on a variable ratio schedule. The characteristics of a variable ratio schedule produce a high rate of response and, what is of most interest in this discussion, such schedules are extremely resistant to extinction (Reynolds, 1968, p. 77).

Nixon Proclamation and Analysis

The concepts discussed in this chapter on tacts are aptly portrayed in the following example of Nixon's verbal behavior.

1  "National Moment of Prayer and Thanksgiving"

   "A long and trying ordeal for America has ended. Our Nation has achieved its goal of peace with honor in Vietnam. As a people with a deep and abiding faith, we know that no great work can be accomplished without the aid and inspiration of Almighty God. No time could be more fitting for grateful prayer and meditation than the opening moment of the peace we have achieved with His help.

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Now, Therefore, I, Richard Nixon, President of the United States of America, as requested by the Congress, do hereby designate 7:00 p.m., e.s.t., January 27, 1973, as a National Moment of Prayer and Thanksgiving, and the 24-hour period beginning then as a National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving.

I urge all men and women of goodwill to join the prayerful hope that this moment marks not only the end of the war in Vietnam, but the beginning of a new era of world peace and understanding for all mankind.

I authorize the flying of the American flag at the appointed hour, and I call on all the people of the United States to observe this moment with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-sixth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-seventh.²

Staats and Staats (1958, p. 37) showed that "... attitude responses elicited by a word can be conditioned to a contiguously presented socially significant, verbal stimulus." They held that these attitudes were established by classical conditioning. The words they utilized as unconditioned stimuli may also be considered

to be operantly conditioned reinforcers. It should be noted that there is some controversy over whether classical and operant conditioning are separate entities. Staats and Staats (1958, p. 38) used words such as gift, sacred, happy, bitter, failure, and ugly. These words may also be considered to be examples of tactual discriminative stimuli. They will characteristicly evoke a given response or response class member. The Nixon prayer cited previously contains many such words.

Assuming the majority of the President's audience has some religious background and has celebrated Thanksgiving, the title is an effective discriminative stimulus for certain types of responses that the President might find reinforcing. The responses may include attention, attachment of special significance to the text, and the inability to refute or deny what occurs in the body of the proclamation. In the first sentence, the President immediately reinforces attention and the words in the title by announcing the end of an aversive situation. He goes on to positively reinforce us with the statement that our nation has achieved its goal. The attitude or belief that we have indeed achieved our goal is conditioned by what Staats and Staats (1958) would call a significant verbal unconditioned stimulus, or, in this case, the words peace with honor. Not only do these words reinforce the preceding statements, but they also...
evoke responses which Nixon would find useful.

In the next paragraph, Nixon informs us that our faith in the Lord is contingent upon several things. One is that a great work has been accomplished, that great work being the positive reinforcement of the previous sentence, America's goal of peace with honor. The second contingency is that the great work was accomplished with the help of God. In the next sentence, Nixon spells out the contingencies even more clearly when he says that God has helped us obtain peace. That God himself helped to obtain the peace makes it aversive for a believer to doubt that a peace exists. In the same sentence, Nixon indicates that such divine intervention requires a prayer response. Once more, the use of the word prayer is a discriminative stimulus for all the responses conditioned to that word. When the word prayer occurs, the responses occur. Since the stimulus control of the word prayer as spoken by Nixon through the mass media is not as strong as when the clergymen ask us to bow our heads in prayer, the response to Nixon's use of the word prayer is not as strong. However, some portion of the prayer response will occur. This is the case even though the President designates that the prayer shall take place at a time indicated. Thus, while people are reading or listening to this statement, they are responding with certain responses evoked by the discriminative
stimulus word, prayer.

In the paragraph starting with line twelve, Nixon states his name and immediately follows this with the words, President of the United States of America. This serves several purposes. The first is simply to associate the stimulus of his name with the subsequent phrase to extend the stimulus control characteristics of that phrase to his name. Secondly, the phrase undoubtedly has conditioned reinforcer or unconditioned stimulus aspects. If this is the case, then the words Richard Nixon will have conditioned to them certain attitudes previously associated only with the phrase President of the United States of America.

The paragraph beginning on line twenty contains the contingency that may be read as, only if you join in the prayer that marks the end of the Vietnam war are you a man of goodwill. He goes on to offer the positive reinforcement of flying the flag during the time of the prayer.

It should be restated at this point that it is irrelevant whether Nixon purposefully designs his speeches with behavior modification in mind or not. It does not matter whether his verbal behavior is a product of his subconscious or is an accident of random words. His motivations are not in question. Rather, this paper is concerned with the analysis of political verbal behavior as
observed in the mass media. Nixon is merely an example.

The example of Nixon's verbal behavior brings out an important point. That is that more than one response may be conditioned to a particular verbal discriminative stimulus (Skinner, 1957, p. 186). This is illustrated in the use of the word, prayer. The word prayer may have certain responses, such as attention, conditioned to it which are desirable to the President; but it may have certain other responses which may be undesirable. It is possible that a person raised in a religious home who later becomes an atheist would maintain the attention response to the word prayer, but also have a new response, such as contempt, conditioned to the word. This possibility serves as an example of the limitations of mass media as contrasted to face to face interactions.
ADDITIONAL VARIABLES

Consequences of Ineffective Propaganda

Verbal behavior does not receive reinforcement on as regular a schedule as nonverbal behavior. Skinner (1957, p. 206) points out that a result of variable schedules of consequation is that our verbal behavior is performed with less assurance than nonverbal behavior. He goes on to say that we are also not as disturbed by occasional failures (Skinner, 1957, p. 206). This last point is of particular importance in a mass media situation. It may be more accurate to say that our rates of responding are not significantly affected by an occasional failure. A failure in the mass media situation may be considered to be embodied in a speech which is devoid of effective tactual discriminative stimuli, and which does not contain contingent reinforcement or mands. The failure is compounded if the long range behavior which is affected by the speech is not reinforced, or perhaps even punished. When the ratio of reinforcement becomes too large, we have seen that a strain in responding develops. However, an occasional lapse in Mr. Nixon's effectiveness as a behavior modifier should not have serious results with respect to the responding of a populace maintained on a variable ratio schedule.
Prompts

After a certain behavior has been conditioned by the President through the mass media, an occasion might occur in which Nixon desires the response to be emitted. This may be in speaking before a live audience with the news cameras rolling. The desired response may be an indication of support for some statement or policy Nixon espouses. It is also possible that for some reason that need not be gone into, the response does not have enough strength at the present time to be emitted. Nixon might then decide to provide just enough stimuli to increase the strength of the response to a level where it will be emitted. This is called a prompt (Skinner, 1957, p. 255). One type of prompt, the campaign poster, is commonly outlawed within a certain radius of a voting booth.

The Autoclitic

The President makes frequent use of words or phrases which do not alter the kind of response of the audience, but which increase the precision of stimulus control. They serve to provide the listener with additional information with which he can refine his responding appropriately. The information usually deals with the state of the speaker. President Johnson used to appear before the American people with a heavy heart. President Nixon often-
times wants to make things perfectly clear. The President has refined to a great degree, the use of this device called an autoclitic by Skinner (1957, p. 316). This can be seen when Nixon accepts resignations, accepts resignations with regret, accepts resignations with deep regret, deeply felt regret, deeply felt personal regret and so on.

Incompatible Responses

In the clinical situation, the therapist who wishes to eliminate a certain response in a client may resort to conditioning a response that is incompatible with the undesirable response. An analog of this procedure is particularly helpful for the mass media behavior modifier in situations where the responses that the politician wishes to condition are considered immoral or carry social sanctions. Thus, if a politician wishes to stand on a pro-segregation or anti-Negro platform without being open to charges of bigotry, he may seek to use anti-busing or neighborhood schools as issues on which to base statements that will act as reinforcers for his audience. He does not openly espouse anti-Negro attitudes; he merely uses responses that might be considered by many people to be incompatible with pro-Negro attitudes.
Response Cost

President Nixon has used a procedure which involves the contingent removal of already acquired reinforcers. This procedure is widely referred to as response cost (Kanfer and Phillips, 1970, p. 324). Mr. Nixon's use of response cost was particularly evident during remarks made on a motorcade through Ohio in October, 1972. At one of the stops, Nixon made some impromptu remarks to the effect that Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in Southeast Asia will not have died in vain. He went on to say, that those who have deserted their country rather than serve in the military will have to pay by going to jail. He was, in effect, imposing response cost upon those men who he indicated would have to lose their currently held freedom. Response cost is used even more effectively when the cost is directly related to the audience. In this case, the President might inform his listeners that if the Congress does not budget responsibly, then a tax increase is inevitable. Response cost is basically a punishment procedure. To avoid having any hostility directed toward himself as a punishing agent, the President should shift the source of punishment to another agent. However, when the recipient of the punishment is someone that the public looks upon unfavorably, the President may mete out the punishment himself.
Therefore, the President calls for imprisonment of deserters and draft dodgers, or threatens to renew his bombing of North Vietnam if North Vietnamese treaty violations continue.
AUDIENCE VARIABLES

How does the President know what stimuli have potential for use as contingent reinforcement within his statements? How does he determine those words and phrases that may be used as discriminative stimuli for responses he wishes the public to emit? What words or phrases act as conditioned stimuli for certain attitudes and responses? What stimuli are effective for what audience?

Effective Stimuli

Audiences vary in their responses to various verbal stimuli. This is particularly true of tactual stimuli (Skinner, 1957, p. 175). A discriminative stimulus for something in one audience may be a stimulus for some completely different response in another audience. In the 1972 Presidential election, Nixon constantly referred to something he called the New American Majority. This may be read to say that he had discovered a large number of Americans who responded in similar ways to the same stimuli.

On certain issues, the New American Majority is undoubtedly not unified. It is unlikely that a Kansas farmer and a New York grain exporter will agree on farm support levels. However, on other issues, similar stimuli
may produce similar responses in the two men. Both men may strongly believe that federal spending must be curtailed, drug abuse halted, and that amnesty must never be granted to deserters and draft dodgers. The key to control of the behavior of the public is to be able to obtain data on what would be effective tactual discriminative stimuli for the audience one is addressing. The politician must know what words and phrases serve as effective contingent reinforcers within the context of his communication. He must know what is aversive and what is rewarding. The successful politician does not deliver the speech he has just given to the National Association of Manufacturers when he subsequently addresses the AFL-CIO.

Let us assume that large segments of the American people have similar conditioning histories. If this is true, then certain broad classes of stimuli are discriminative for certain responses. Thus, stimuli such as prayer, America, American flag, President, peace, honor, truth, justice and so on, all have discriminative properties for similar responses from large numbers of people. Furthermore, people with similar conditioning histories should have certain stimuli in common that can serve as negative and positive reinforcers.
Opinion Polls

For mass communications purposes, one of the most effective ways to obtain data on stimuli is through the opinion polls. That politicians, and particularly Nixon, feel that this is an effective technique is borne out by the fact that a minimum of $1,500,000 was spent by all politicians, including $584,000 by Nixon, in commissioning private polls in 1968 (Roll and Cantril, 1972, p. 3). Opinion polls have many uses, but one of the most important, politically speaking, is for the purpose of positioning of the issues (Roll and Cantril, 1972, p. 55). Positioning the issue involves arranging the messages in such a way as to maximize the probability of a favorable response from the public. This technique assumes that the politician already has a stand on the issue which he wishes to convince the public of in order to gain their support. An even more effective and expedient use of the polls is to determine the stance that has widespread public support, and to then use the stimuli indicated.

The President said in a nationwide radio address on October 21, 1972: "Fortunately, what the new majority wants for America and what I want for this nation basically are the same." In another radio address one week later, he said: "The new majority is a majority of Americans from all parts of the country who agree on certain
fundamental values and principles that are basic to America's ideals and its experience." In this statement, he shows his understanding that certain stimuli cause a large number of Americans to respond in similar ways.

The President made some particularly revealing remarks in an address at Atlanta on October 12, 1972. Here are some excerpts from that speech.

"What is important now is that we find a way to make this one nation, that we find a way to work together, that we find the way in this campaign and in this election to be guided by our hopes and by our ideals, and not by our fears and our hates.

That is why I am campaigning in all regions, among all races, among all religions, among all age groups. People don't have to be for me to talk to them [sic]. What I am trying to do is to appeal to all.

That is why we seek what I call a new American majority. Let me talk about that majority, if I can, in terms of the South."

Nixon went on to say in a later section of his address:

"Now getting that issue out of the way, let me tell you what the number one issues, based on the polls we have seen, national polls--Gallup, Harris, all the rest, they all come out the same--the
number one issues in the South are the
two on issues in the nation. These
are the issues that make most Southerners
potential members of what we call the
New American Majority."\textsuperscript{3}

Mr. Nixon once again is showing his considerable understanding of the fact that if he can present certain stimuli to people, he will succeed in his goal of trying to appeal to all. If one looks at the election results, it certainly appears that he did, indeed, do just that.

\textsuperscript{3}October 12, 1972, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, General Services Administration.
SOME DATA SHOWING MASS BEHAVIOR CHANGE

That the President's mass verbal behavior is capable of producing changes in the responses of the public is supported by the following data.

A Gallup Poll conducted from November 10-13, 1972, which involved personal interviews with 1207 people, eighteen and older, in 250 localities, asked the following question: "Are you in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?" A breakdown of the findings of this poll is included in Table 1.

A compilation of Gallup Polls taken over the last several years provides a baseline of responding with respect to attitudes toward capital punishment (see Table 2).

The polls from the years 1969, 1971 and March, 1972 clearly indicate a stable number of people who respond affirmatively with respect to whether the death penalty should be utilized. Between the months of March and November of 1972, a sudden decisive increase in the number of people who are in favor of capital punishment can be seen.

This sudden increase in pro-capital punishment sentiment may reflect a number of statements made by President Nixon dealing with crime and capital punishment.
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<tr>
<td>1972 (November)</td>
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During the months of March to October of 1972, the President made four separate statements dealing with crime or capital punishment. The final statement was made on October 15, less than one month before the final poll sample was interviewed. This statement was made in the form of a nationwide radio address entitled Crime and Drug Abuse.
CONCLUSION

Finally, it is necessary to point out that this thesis is not an attempt to develop new, omnipotent, mass indoctrination techniques. Rather, it reflects cognizance of the fact that if propaganda affects behavior, then the procedure by which this occurs can be explained by the laws of behavior.

Such an explanation is necessary to maintain government by the consent of the governed. The position is well stated in the following quote.

"It is concluded that controlled human behavior is an existing fact which cannot be altered and individuals concerned with personal freedom should at least consider that perhaps the only meaningful form of behavioral freedom must be based on a knowledge of the factors which, indeed, control us."
(Ulrich, 1967, p. 229)
REFERENCES


Scott, W. A. Attitude change through reward of verbal behavior. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1957, 55, 72-75.


