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Series Editors: George R. Goethals, Terry L. Price, and J. Thomas Wren

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Books Appearing in this Series:

*The Values of Presidential Leadership*

edited by Terry L. Price and J. Thomas Wren

# The Values of Presidential Leadership

*Edited by*

Terry L. Price

and

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Grant "Blinked": Appraising Presidential Leadership*

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Frequently during the first six years of Ulysses S. Grant's presidency (1869–1877), white Southerners in the former Confederate states attempted to reassert their total control over black citizens. Grant responded very forcefully on several occasions, crushing the newly formed Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina in 1872 and, that same year, sending troops to support the recently elected Republican governor of Louisiana against a militia mutiny and mob riots. But support for Grant's actions in defense of blacks grew increasingly unpopular in the North and within the Republican Party. Defending blacks when their own state governments failed to do so represented an unprecedented expansion of federal power. Maintaining troops in the South was also very expensive. Grant steadily lost political support. After three rapid interventions, Louisiana in September 1874, Mississippi that December, and Louisiana again the following January, even Grant's pro-Reconstruction vice president described him as "the mill-stone around the neck of our party that would sink it out of sight" (Garfield, 1981, p. 6). When the governor of Mississippi asked Grant to send in more federal troops to stop the harassment of blacks later in 1875, Grant initially refused. In a 2002 *American Experience* television production, historian Don Carter summarized Grant's refusal at this moment by saying "in the end, he blinked" (Bosh & Deane, 2002). This statement clearly characterizes



Grant's behavior in this particular instance as a failure to protect black rights and black lives and also as a turning point that led to the subjugation of blacks in the South that lasted until the 1960s.

We will use this moment in history as a vehicle for considering, from a social psychological perspective, some of the ways that presidents and presidencies are evaluated by biographers, reviewers, historians, media commentators, and the general public. Grant provides a useful and interesting case for considering the elements of person perception that help us understand how evaluations of presidents are formed and how these evaluations change. As we shall see, Grant is one of the most enigmatic persons to hold the office of president, and his presidency is actively being reassessed.

We will proceed as follows: First, we will consider the psychology of causal attribution, the issues it raises about Grant "blinking," and, more generally, how specific presidential behavior can be understood. Next, we will explore psychological analyses of "greatness ratings" by historians. These studies suggest that such ratings may be largely based on whether or not just a few pieces of information about a presidency activate a "leader schema." Third, we will consider some of the basic dimensions of personality, as described in the psychological literature in general and in the presidential leadership literature in particular. Can we describe the basic dimensions of presidential personality and their relation to greatness ratings? Finally, we will consider Grant himself. First, we will review what psychological studies suggest about his personality and the relation between his personality and his rated greatness or, rather, lack thereof. We will then suggest criteria upon which Grant might be judged and assess his standing on those criteria based on our understanding of the historical literature.

### **I Attributional Analyses of Behavior**

The study of the ways people make causal attributions about human behavior begins with Fritz Heider's (1958) classic discussion of "the naïve analysis of action" (Heider, p. 79). Heider's basic argument is that observers seek to identify the underlying stable causes of behavior so that they can better understand and predict their world. He pays close attention to how observers perceive the factors that affect the outcomes of actions, particularly whether those actions succeed or fail. Most generally, an action outcome is dependent on two kinds of forces: personal and environmental. Thus action succeeds when the personal forces

applied toward completing an action are greater than the environmental forces or obstacles that must be overcome. Personal forces in turn also number two: the individual's level of ability and the degree of effort applied. The environmental forces are external factors that make the task simple or difficult. Heider goes on to point out that perceivers believe that a person *can* effect an outcome if his or her ability to make the action happen is greater than the obstacles standing in the way of success. Thus we can consider whether a person *can* effect an outcome by assessing whether his or her ability exceeds the difficulty of the task. If the person *can* effect the outcome, the result depends on whether he or she tries and how hard.

What attributional analysis of action underlies the summary judgment that Grant blinked in 1875? That judgment at least implicitly points the causal finger to Grant's insufficient trying. He did not try at all, or he did not try hard enough. Thus his failure is one of will rather than capacity. It is, therefore, a sign of moral weakness. Embedded in this characterization is the implicit premise that Grant could have done more, specifically that he could have dispatched troops in this particular instance or done something more in general to further protect the rights and the lives of black citizens. In Heider's terms, Grant's power or ability to help blacks is being judged to exceed any difficulties posed by environmental contingencies, whether political, military, or logistical.

This characterization of Grant's behavior raises several questions. First, is "Grant blinked" at all a fair summary of Grant's behavior? Darren Newton (1976) has written about the complex ways that observers segment behavior. A specific action in a complex set of actions and events that unfolded during 1875 is characterized as blinking, as caving into evil forces. Does this characterization withstand an examination of the known facts? There is a great deal of controversy about that. We will return to this question later. Second, assuming for the moment that Grant did blink—in the sense that he decided not to send in federal troops to protect black citizens at a particular moment—and therefore undermined Reconstruction, what further can we say about the correct attributions for this decision?

One relevant attributional perspective is Harold Kelley's (1967) *covariation model*. The general idea is that behavior can be attributed to causes that are present when the behavior is present and absent when the behavior is absent. More specifically, does the behavior seem to covary with the actor or with the situation in which the actor behaved? Kelley suggests that the causes of specific actions can be attributed to the actor or to the situation by considering several aspects of the behavior in question.



First, a perceiver might consider whether the actor's response to the situation was *distinctive*. In the "Grant blinked" case, did he fail to act on behalf of blacks in most situations, or should his response in this situation be considered unusual or unique, that is, distinctive? Second, a perceiver might consider whether the actor's response was *consensual*. Would other actors or potential actors have responded similarly or differently? Responses that are highly distinctive and highly consensual should, according to the covariation analysis, be attributed to the situation. If an actor did something that was quite different from his normal behavior, and if he did something that almost everyone else would have done in the same situation, the response is logically attributable to the situation the actor faced, not to a personal quality. It is important to note, however, that ordinary people are often poor assessors of consensus. Even when information is explicitly provided about how others might have acted, observers chronically underuse this information (Kassin, 1979; Borgida & Nisbett, 1977).

Kelley's (1972) *discounting principle* is also relevant to a perceiver deciding what to make of Grant's action. This principle holds that a behavior should not be attributed to any particular cause to the extent that there are other plausible causes for that behavior. The most salient "particular cause" is generally the person himself. Heider (1958) theorized, and much research has shown, that perceivers are highly biased toward attributing behavior to the actor (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Jones, 1990). In the case of Grant's blinking, there would be a bias toward attributing his action to some lack of concern for blacks or weakness in mastering the situation. However, the discounting principle holds that Grant himself should be discounted as a possible cause to the extent that the situation he faced is a plausible cause. Combining covariation and discounting principles, to the extent that Grant's behavior in the situation is distinctive and consensual, and to the extent that the situation that Grant faced is a plausible cause for his behavior, Grant himself as a cause must be discounted.

A final attributional perspective is offered by Bernard Weiner et al. (1972) in their extension of Heider's analysis. Weiner notes that successes or failures can be attributed to either personal or situational causes and that those causes can be stable or variable. In many situations involving success or failure, an internal stable cause is ability, high or low. An internal but variable cause is effort, great or small. A stable external cause is task difficulty, high or low, while an unstable external cause is luck, good or bad. Thus a perceiver of Grant's action in the context of 1875 must ask whether Grant had the ability to succeed, whether he tried, whether the task he faced was easy or difficult, and whether he had good

or bad luck. The covariation principles again help perceivers decide. Did Grant's action in the case under consideration reflect "the same old Grant" or was it unusual, and would others have sent in the troops, or would they likewise have declined? Also, perceivers would ask about the difficulty of the task Grant faced.

We want to make the case that Grant had done a great deal to protect and extend the welfare and well-being of blacks and that the situation he faced was extremely difficult, as well as quite confused. Let us define the behavior being considered. The simple version—the one undoubtedly relied upon by the historian when he made his uncharitable remark—is that Grant received a request for troops from the governor of Mississippi at a particular moment and turned it down. This refusal to take action came at the end of a string of vigorous responses, mentioned above. But Grant knew he did not have much political support for another intervention and, consequently, he said no.

In September 1875, Mississippi was only two months away from holding its state legislative elections. Mississippi had had a less than tranquil racial history in the previous ten years. In July 1875, Governor Adelbert Ames, a transplanted Northerner, had called upon Grant to supply federal troops to end an armed standoff near Vicksburg. Grant initially refused, citing lack of jurisdiction; Ames had yet to declare a state of emergency or call out the militia. The troubles grew worse later that autumn. On December 7, Ames called a state of emergency and asked the state legislature to call on Grant for aid, removing the cited legal barrier. The crisis had advanced, and Grant responded (Gillette, 1979, pp. 150–153; Scaturro, 1998, pp. 87–88).

This form of restraint was typical of Grant's Southern policy. He had refused a request from the South Carolina governor that September as well, believing that the company of federal troops already present was sufficient to keep the peace. Grant knew well the resistance stoked by the deployment of troops to the South, and he vastly preferred to have local and state militias keep the peace and resolve disputes. Not long before, Congress had refused to support Grant's proposed solution to the disputed governorship of Arkansas, and the general outcry over his repeated interventions in Louisiana the previous winter—which were in response to nothing less than an attempted coup—still echoed through Republican councils (Scaturro, 1998, p. 91).

It was in this context that Governor Ames wrote to the president on September 8. He asked that troops be sent to help put down a new wave of violence that had begun four days before and had swept the state. Many Republicans tried to convince Grant that an intervention would



upset the upcoming Ohio gubernatorial elections in October (Scaturro, 1998, p. 89). Grant also received conflicting reports on the level of violence in the state, including one from a county sheriff who said that no federal troops were needed in his jurisdiction (McFeely, 1981, p. 421). Grant was hesitant to intervene. On September 13 he wrote to Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont:

[The] whole public is tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South, and there is so much unwholesome lying done by the press and people in regard to the cause and extent of these breaches of the peace that the great majority are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government. . . . I heartily wish that peace and good order may be restored without issuing the proclamation. *But if it is not, the proclamation must be issued; and if it is, I shall instruct the commander of the forces to have no child's play.* (Scaturro, 1998, p. 89, emphasis added)

In short, Grant was willing to intervene, but only if absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, the reply Governor Ames received was edited by Pierrepont to remove the strongest portions. What remained was critical of Ames, calling on him to be more active on his own behalf. Ames also made the mistake of failing to respond to a request for more information, meaning that Pierrepont, who opposed intervention, could claim to Grant that the violence was not widespread enough to warrant federal aid. Indeed, the situation was such that when Pierrepont's message to Ames was given to the press, it received wide support from Northern Republican newspapers. They endorsed the criticism of Ames and praised Grant's restraint (Gillette, 1979, pp. 157–161).

There is wide disagreement among historians both on what Grant knew and who might be to blame for any gaps in his knowledge. Ames himself was remarkably unclear. He made a peace agreement with the white militias, a truce that produced a period of calm in late September. Despite his continuing desire for aid, he wrote to Grant, "your letter and Atty General Pierrepont's have produced marked improvement in the condition of affairs here, the white liners, whose only policy is intimidation, are themselves somewhat intimidated" (Gillette, 1979, p. 161). Most recent works have been relatively forgiving of Grant, pointing out Ames's contradictory messages and the meddling influences of Pierrepont, but earlier books are quite harsh, saying that Grant was willingly deceived.

Grant eventually did send troops to Mississippi, but only just before the election. And these soldiers were ordered to keep the peace, not to

police the polling stations (Gillette, 1979, pp. 156, 161–162). Despite dead calm on election day, Republicans were already intimidated and the Democrats swept into power in a fraud-wrought vote. Negro rights, and Grant's policies, experienced a drastic setback.

Looking at this disputed moment, it is very difficult to decide what to make of it. Reconstruction itself blinked, even if Grant might be excused, and the consequences were terrible. Yet what is to be said about this blinking? To earlier historians, such as William McFeely and William Gillette, this is the worst incident in a string of bad ones and, for McFeely, the last before Grant abandoned the pretext that he cared for freedmen. The *American Experience* documentary, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, shares that view. "Grant did what he had never done in war. He retreated," says the narrator, going without pause into a discussion of the failure of Reconstruction (Bosh & Deane, 2002). In Heider's terms, the documentary portrays this incident in Grant's presidency as a failure to try, not an inability to succeed.

For whatever it is worth, Grant himself said that the decision not to provide more help closer to the election was an agonizing one. He saw it as a tradeoff: if he intervened in Mississippi just then, the Republicans would lose the decisive Ohio election (and Republican defeats in the North had their own repercussions for Reconstruction). He would have been willing to accept that, but only if he thought he could truly make a difference in Mississippi. By that point, he did not believe that he could (Scaturro, 1998, p. 91).

Still, what Grant may or may not have thought after the fact is poor evidence. More helpful are Kelley's criteria of distinctiveness and consensus. Was Grant's failure to intervene part of a broader pattern of indifference or an isolated event? Gillette sees Grant failing to intervene on several occasions, but his view is incomplete. As Frank Scaturro points out, failing to prevent a state with a large white majority (i.e., Texas) from going Democratic is not a failure of the electoral process (1998, p. 82). The side of the angels, as it were, lost fairly sometimes. Grant also did not have unlimited power or authority; he had to work within the law made by an increasingly unsympathetic legislature and judiciary. Still, Grant had an impressive record of dedication before this incident. For example, there were the campaigns against the KKK in the early 1870s and armed interventions in several states, most notably South Carolina and Louisiana. He was also no slouch after the November 1875 Mississippi elections, again sending troops to Louisiana and South Carolina in 1876, the last full year of his presidency. If troops had been available, he would have sent them to other states as well (Scaturro, 1998, p. 98). This incident



in Mississippi, therefore, seems strangely out of place, making it distinctive.

The presence of consensus is even clearer. While Gillette shows only a single newspaper calling for a more active federal role in Mississippi, he lists many that praised Grant's restraint. More telling is the reaction to Grant's Louisiana intervention, just prior to the episode in question. One powerful cartoon showed "Ulysses I" enthroned atop the "murder of Louisiana," with then Attorney General George H. Williams perched on his shoulder, a demon spawn (Bosh & Deane, 2002). The general policy of sending federal troops to the South was so unpopular that mass meetings of protest occurred in the North. Republicans feared electoral defeat in the North, the Supreme Court was increasingly worried about the abuse of federal power, and the public wanted the whole mess to go away. One of Grant's recent biographers writes, "For the last two years of his administration, Grant stood watch over the South almost alone" (Smith, 2001, p. 571). Grant's decision comes at a time when anyone else would have done as he did (and many would have refused to send troops on occasions when Grant did). Thus on grounds of distinctiveness and consensus, Grant's behavior should be attributed to the situation he faced, not to personal callousness or weakness.

We noted earlier that Weiner extended Heider's analysis to consider whether the personal or situational attributions made in a given case are based on stable or variable factors. If we take the harsh and, until recently, common view that Grant failed to care about blacks in Mississippi in fall 1875, can we find evidence of his callousness toward blacks elsewhere? Is there in Grant a stable personal indifference or hostility to black rights? McFeely would argue that "by the summer of 1876 there was no one around the White House who gave a damn about the black people" (McFeely, 1981, p. 439). Grant had an activist attorney general, George F. Hoar, early on, but with his departure, the business of civil rights was totally neglected. But McFeely must stand corrected. Brooks Simpson documents Grant's consistent and extreme concern for freedmen both during and after the war, noting several factual inaccuracies in McFeely's accounting. In his view, at least one man in the White House gave a damn, "the principle occupant of the building" (Simpson, 1987, p. 81). Grant had pushed through the incredibly expansive Civil Rights Act in 1875 (soon held unconstitutional), the very same year as the Mississippi incident. This bill was not only good by the standards of its time, but it was very much like the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If Mississippi represented a failure of Grant's soul, it was remarkably unheralded. There is a reason this man never lost the support of Frederick Douglass. A better

attribution for Grant's behavior is that he faced an overwhelming and increasingly stable external cause—the extreme difficulty of getting anyone else to care.

## II Ratings of Presidential Greatness

Historians have been making "greatness" ratings of presidents for some time. Arthur Schlesinger Sr. conducted polls of historians in 1948 and 1962, asking raters to place presidents in various categories: great, near great, average, below average, and failure. Similar ratings have been done by others, notably Robert Murray and Tim Blessing (1983). And in 1996, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. published in *The New York Times Magazine* the results of a poll very similar to those conducted by his father. Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt were rated as great, while Jefferson, Jackson, Polk, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and Truman were rated as near great. Grant was rated a failure. Only Buchanan and Harding were rated lower.

The results of these polls have been remarkably consistent. Although there have been some changes, these are mostly regarding recent presidents. Kennedy has dropped since the first poll after his death, and Truman and Eisenhower have risen in the ratings. Interestingly, George Washington was rated very highly in the earliest polls, dropped some in the 1970s, and has regained his lofty spot in the most recent polls. But there has been little change in Grant's ratings. He is always at or very near the bottom.

Dean Keith Simonton (1987) has done some fascinating work trying to identify the various kinds of information about presidents that contribute to greatness ratings. His work raises disturbing questions about what information and analyses inform these ratings. Using statistical analyses of the variables that predict the Murray-Blessing ratings—the ones Simonton considers the best—Simonton has produced a "six-variable prediction equation" that accounts for 82 percent of the variance in the ratings. The six variables, in descending order of the magnitude of their contribution to greatness ratings are: (1) whether the president had a scandal during his administration, (2) whether he had been a war hero prior to assuming the presidency, (3) whether he was assassinated, (4) whether he is considered intellectually brilliant, (5) the number of years he was a war president, and (6) the total number of years he served as president. The scandal factor reduces greatness ratings, the other variables increase them. It is worth noting that the scandal factor plays the largest role in predicting greatness ratings.



There are some compelling data demonstrating that these kinds of information affect greatness ratings. When college students are given information about unidentified leaders pertaining to just the six variables in the formula, they produce greatness ratings very highly correlated with historical greatness ratings. Of course, it is always possible that even though greatness ratings of anonymous leaders by college students are predicted by the terms in the equations, the greatness ratings by scholars are actually produced by more intimate knowledge of each president. Thus we must ask whether other kinds of information can be shown to affect the historical ratings. It has been difficult to find any that have a systematic effect. However, Simonton has examined the differences between greatness ratings predicted from the formula and actual greatness ratings. There are some interesting cases showing that specific information known by raters does modify the ratings. Washington and Lincoln are rated higher than predicted by formula, probably because of their extraordinary roles in holding the Republic together at its beginning, in Washington's case, and at its moment of greatest crisis, in Lincoln's. On the other end of the scale are presidents whose actual ratings are even worse than predicted: Buchanan, Pierce, Grant, and Nixon. Clearly information about specific rather extreme cases produces ratings that depart from the formula. But a great deal is predicted by these largely nonpersonal variables.

More important is Simonton's theory about why the six variables predict greatness ratings. His argument goes as follows: People, and that includes professional scholars as well as the laity, operate from a cognitive schema about leaders. In most general terms, ideal leaders are thought of as people who are strong, active, and good. Simonton speculates that this schema of the ideal leader is likely "an ideal or archetype having trans-historical, even cross-cultural, relevance" (Simonton, 1987, p. 239). Then, when certain information about a leader activates this schema, this and other information is assimilated to the schema, and the person is seen as having ideal leadership qualities. Furthermore, it is argued that the information that observers use in their schema-driven assessments is the information that is most cognitively available. Availability in turn is affected by how salient pieces of information are, how recently they have been attended to, and to what extent the information makes the observer happy or unhappy. From this perspective, because scandal plays such a large role in presidential-greatness ratings, it follows that a president involved in scandal is seen as some combination of weak, passive, and immoral.

It seems clear that people who are not intimately familiar with the lives and careers of particular presidents—including most laypeople and

some scholars—actually use schematic assessments in their evaluations. Are there others who base their assessments on much more detailed information? For example, what about biographers? Many biographers consider the detailed information about their subject's life and behavior and, in many cases, do attributional analyses. For example, both McFeely and Scaturro thoroughly discussed and made attributions for Grant's behavior in Mississippi during fall 1875. Their discussions seem to reflect much more than whether an overall leadership schema is activated. However, clearly authors seem to have different schemas about their subjects. David McCullough (2001) has a more positive schema of John Adams than almost anyone else, save Joseph Ellis (1993), and this is evident throughout his recent biography. Similarly, Robert Dallek's (2003) biography of John F. Kennedy is largely sympathetic. (Ted Widmer's *New York Times* review of that book was entitled "Profile in Courage.") And in the case of Grant, biographers such as Bunting (2004), Korda (2004), McFeely (1981), Scaturro (1998), and Smith (2001) have different overall schemas, outlined clearly in their introductions and prefaces. And the very different schemas of McFeely and Scaturro, for example, inform not just their discussion of 1875 Mississippi, but Grant's whole presidency.

Beyond treating such biographies as legal briefs (which they sometimes resemble) and deciding who makes the best argument, can we identify anything we know about human personalities and the characters of presidents that will help us assess their administrations? To address this question we will first discuss important traits of personality, including some that have been discussed specifically with reference to presidents. Then we will consider how, in general, these traits might support or diminish greatness. Finally, we will consider how Grant can be construed to stand on these personal qualities.

### III Dimensions of the Human Personality

One of the most influential approaches to personality in modern psychology is known as the trait approach. Starting with Carl Jung (1933), psychologists have discussed either types (categories of people) or traits (dimensions on which people can be rated as high, low, or somewhere in the middle). Jung is well known for distinguishing introverts from extraverts. Years later, Hans Eysenck (1952) suggested that different personalities could be well described according to two dimensions, Jung's



extraversion and what Eysenck called neuroticism. Subsequent empirical research starting with Warren Norman (1963) has shown consistently that people can be characterized quite fully by rating them on Eysenck's two dimensions and three others, known collectively as the Big Five. These are neuroticism (also called stability), extraversion (also called surgency), openness (also called curiosity or intellectance), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Interestingly, James David Barber's (1992) book *The Presidential Character* classifies presidents as active or passive and positive or negative. His activity and positivity dimensions are essentially the same as the Big Five dimensions of extraversion and agreeableness. Note also that the Big Five dimensions correspond to the three elements of the leader schema described above: strength and activity are essentially extraversion (surgency) and goodness represents a combination of agreeableness and conscientiousness.

What can we say about how these traits and capacities support, or undermine, effective leadership? A great deal of work discussed by Robert Hogan and Joyce Hogan (2004; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994) shows that emergent and effective leadership is correlated with all of the Big Five characteristics. The best predictors are extraversion/surgency, intellect/openness to experience, and conscientiousness. But stability and agreeableness are correlated as well. Additional research by Simonton (1986) shows that intellectual brilliance is associated with presidential-greatness ratings, as does a subsequent study by Stewart McCann (1992). Also David Winter (1987) has studied needs for achievement, power, and affiliation and has found that the need for power has some correlation with rated presidential performance. Neither Simonton nor Winter finds that achievement motivation is correlated with greatness ratings. However, McCann's data do show a strong relationship with achievement drive. In contrast, affiliation motivation has some negative correlations with greatness ratings.

#### IV The Personality of Ulysses S. Grant

Turning to Grant, can anything be said about how he stands on the Big Five dimensions or other interesting and possibly relevant dimensions of personality? Studies by both Winter and Simonton suggest that Grant is a very unusual case. Based on ratings of need imagery in their first inaugural addresses, Winter rates all the presidents who gave inaugural addresses, from Washington through Reagan, on the three motives noted above: achievement, affiliation, and power. Grant ranks last in power imagery

(Truman and Kennedy are the highest). He is slightly above average in achievement imagery and slightly below on affiliation. The low power rating might be a caution about Grant, given power's association with greatness. More intriguing are two studies by Simonton. In the first, Simonton constructed for each president personality descriptions (each roughly 750 words) based on biographical reference works, presidential fact books, and American history compendia. Identifying information was removed. Eight raters—comprising Simonton himself and seven research assistants who did not know the identities of the presidents being rated—marked the extent to which 300 adjectives from the Gough Adjective Check List, a standard personality measure, applied to each personality description. Ratings of 110 adjectives meeting several statistical criteria were analyzed to identify fourteen personality factors on which each president could be scored: Moderation, Friendliness, Intellectual Brilliance, Machiavellianism, Poise and Polish, Achievement Drive, Forcefulness, Wit, Physical Attractiveness, Pettiness, Tidiness, Conservatism, Inflexibility, and Pacifism. (The only one of these personality factors that correlates with greatness ratings is Intellectual Brilliance, as noted above.)

Simonton creates a very interesting dendrogram, a graphical representation of the similarity between all the presidents' personality profiles. There are several interesting clusters in the ratings. For example, both John and John Quincy Adams have "very comparable profiles" (p. 153). Grant, however, is "the clear outcast in personality makeup" (p. 153). He is not similar to any of the others. Only Thomas Jefferson approaches Grant, from a distance, in being unlike others. In these ratings, Grant basically comes across as a slob: He is rated by far the lowest on Achievement Drive. He also gets very low marks for Poise and Polish and Tidiness. He is rated third lowest on Intellectual Brilliance. He is below the mean on the positive qualities and above the mean on negative qualities, including Pettiness and Inflexibility. In another article Simonton (1988) had seven undergraduates rate the 39 presidents on 82 style items. Once again a factor analysis was conducted, and this time five styles were identified: Interpersonal, Charismatic, Deliberative, Creative, and Neurotic. Inspection of the items comprising each style suggests that they are very similar to the Big Five personality traits initially identified by Norman. The Interpersonal style reflects agreeableness, Charismatic reflects extraversion/surgency, Deliberative reflects conscientiousness, Creative reflects openness/curiosity/intellectance, and Neurotic is clearly stability/neuroticism. Grant's standing on these style dimensions once again "sets him apart from all the rest of the American



chief executives" (Simonton, 1988, p. 931). He is lowest of all the presidents on the Charismatic and Deliberative measures, the second most Neurotic, and the eighth least Creative. Not only is Grant rated as different, he is rated extremely poorly.

Above we suggested some modest linkages between personality and rated greatness. As Grant is rated terribly on four of the five style dimensions corresponding closely to the Big Five personality dimensions, and as those dimensions are associated with effective leadership, perhaps it is no wonder that Grant is viewed as such a poor president. But we need to take a closer look. Simonton has been kind enough to provide us with the personality descriptions used in both of the studies described above. The Grant description is undoubtedly a very fair representation of the information included about Grant in the reference works noted above. It is composed almost entirely of quotes that are by design somewhat repetitious, reflecting points that multiple sources felt worthy of emphasis. This allows several common themes to be identified. Grant was "politically naïve and financially inept," known for "drinking heavily," "personally honest" but "stupid and indiscreet" in detecting dishonesty in associates; he "loved animals" and was an "average student," "morally insensitive," "callous," and "a professional military man." These quotes are representative of the broader selection, and the themes they suggest appeared multiple times in only slightly varying forms. Note the lack of elaboration for the last trait. Based on what is included in Simonton's sketch, it would be difficult for a rater to say with any certainty whether Grant was a good soldier, let alone a great one. The other descriptors are enough to make one wonder how such a man could ever be elected president. The question, however, is whether the received wisdom that informed Simonton's description offers an accurate portrait of Grant.

It seems clear, following Scaturro, that the received wisdom reflects biographies and other treatments of Grant that preceded the recent reconsideration of his presidency. What would a revisionist sketch look like? We have constructed one based almost entirely on observations of Grant made by his contemporaries that appear in either recent biographies or older biographies that clearly did not consider those observations in their negative treatments of Grant, such as that of McFeely. It is approximately half the length of Simonton's descriptions, but it gives a flavor of what one would read:

On personal style: "[he] was an uncommon fellow—the most modest, the most disinterested and the most honest man I ever knew, with

a temper that nothing could disturb and a judgment that was judicial in its comprehensiveness and wisdom. Not a great man except morally; not an original or brilliant man, but sincere, thoughtful, deep and gifted with courage that never faltered" (Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, in Catton, 1960, p. 389). As remembered by one of his West Point classmates: "[his] distinguished trait . . . was a girlish modesty, a taciturnity born of his own modesty, but a thoroughness in the accomplishment of whatever task was assigned him" (Confederate General James Longstreet, in Bunting, 2004, p. 17). "A great man for details" (Union General William Tecumseh Sherman, in Simpson, 2000, p. 461) who had a "wonderful power of drawing information from others in conversation without their being aware they were imparting it" (Grant's military aide, Ely S. Parker, in Simpson, 2000, p. 460).

On military record: he served heroically in war, showing great personal bravery. However, peacetime service did not agree with him: "lonely and discouraged he began to drink regularly and alone" (Bunting, 2004, p. 30). This led to his eventual resignation from the army. In his second army career: "I should fear him more than any of their officers I have yet heard of. He is not a man of genius, but he is clearheaded, quick and daring," said an enemy officer shortly before Grant's rise to high rank (Confederate General Richard S. Ewell, in Fuller, 1957, p. 59). "He does not know as much about books and strict military art and science as some others, but he possesses the last quality of great generalship; he knows, he divines, when the supreme hour has come in a campaign or battle and always boldly seizes it," said another one of his subordinates (General Sherman, in Simpson, 2000, p. 460).

As president: he drafted and passed the "greatest treaty of actual and immediate arbitration the world has ever seen," which helped rebuild ties with a major ally and peacefully resolved a major dispute with another potential enemy (Scaturro, 1998, pp. 52–55). On civil rights: he earned praise from prominent contemporary leaders. "To [him] more than to any other man the negro owes his enfranchisement and the Indian a humane policy . . . his moral courage has surpassed that of his party" (Frederick Douglass, in Scaturro, 1998, p. 105).

In postpresidential business he was a failure, ruining himself financially. He struggled in the last weeks of his life to finish his memoirs. Considered a military biography to rank with Julius Caesar's and a "literary masterpiece" (Samuel Clemens, in Perry, 2004, p. 235), Grant's *Memoirs* provided for his wife after his death.



Suppose raters reacted to sketches such as the preceding ones or rated Grant after reading what we think is the current "best evidence," the revisionist biographies, how might Grant's rating on the Big Five change? Let us consider openness/curiosity/intellectance first. Is Grant one of the least intelligent presidents? Without making comparative assessments, what would assessors make of Grant having produced military memoirs considered among the most impressive ever written; that his messages to Congress, authored by himself, are full and lucid; and that, as his subordinate General Meade wrote, "there is one striking thing about Grant's orders: no matter how hurriedly he may write them on the field, no one over had the slightest doubt as to their meaning, or ever had to read them over a second time to understand them" (Wilson, 1962, p. 143, cf. Perry, 2004, p. 234)? Grant would clearly stand high on Howard Gardner's (1983) dimension of linguistic intelligence. Bruce Catton and other Civil War historians write at some length about the soundness, if not brilliance, of Grant's military strategy, and his particular ability to read and remember maps and to think spatially. These observations speak to what Gardner would construe as Grant's logical-mathematical and visual-spatial intelligences.

What about the Big Five extraversion/surgency dimension? Was Grant passive? James David Barber (1980) classified Grant as passive-positive in an article about Ronald Reagan. He scores low on Simonton's (1986) dimension of Forcefulness. However, Scaturro (1998) describes Grant as an "innovator" who provided the "impetus" for much of the legislation passed by Congress during his administration (p. 59). He cites Michael Les Benedict (1989) who wrote that Grant "dominated his era, a stronger president than most have recognized" (Benedict, 1989, p. 377; quoted in Scaturro, 1998, p. 61). Again, there is clearly a need for a second look.

Let us also consider neuroticism. In Simonton's (1988) study, Grant scores highest (i.e., worst) on this dimension of style. Yet Grant's unflapability and imperturbability are legendary. Captain Charles Francis Adams Jr. (brother of Henry Adams, who savaged Grant) served as "commander of the headquarters cavalry escort" and observed Grant closely: "he handles those around him so quietly and well, he so evidently has the faculty of disposing of work and managing men, he is cool and quiet, almost stolid and as if stupid, and in a crisis he is one against whom all around . . . would instinctively lean" (Simpson, 2000, p. 319).

Grant stands last on Simonton's Deliberative Style, a close proxy of the Big Five's conscientiousness, which includes the ideas of being "hard-working, persevering, [and] organized" (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan,

1994, p. 504). Certainly during the Civil War there can be little question that Grant showed these qualities. His standing on this trait during his presidency has been challenged, but the record of his careful dealings with Congress and the constant turmoil in the former Confederacy suggest conscientiousness.

Grant's agreeableness is revealed in what his contemporaries said about him. While plain, reserved, and quiet, those close to him found him agreeable and engaging. Frederick Douglass commented, "Many who approached him told me he was a silent man. To me, he was one of the best conversationalists I have ever met" (Benedict, 1989, p. 352; quoted in Scaturro, 1998, p. 9).

In short, the received wisdom suggests one set of conclusions about Grant's personality. The revised wisdom suggests another.

## V Reconsidering Grant

Ongoing changes in perceptions of Grant have given us a puzzle. Someone reading a book on Grant or the Grant years by McFeely, Gillette, or a representative of the Dunning school would be left with a far different view of the man than someone reading one of the more recent works on him by Bunting, Scaturro, Smith, and Simpson. A recent Web posting by attorney and sociologist Nathan Newman (2006) asks whether Grant was "Our Greatest President." Historians have always disagreed about a great many things, so these differences themselves are nothing new. Attribution theory does, however, offer some insight as to the reason Grant scholarship may be changing in this particular way.

An economic crisis or panic swept the country in 1873, Grant's Indian policy suffered in 1876 at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and Reconstruction failed in 1876. These are a host of ways in which the American people were not better off at the end of Grant's administration than at its beginning. But Grant had the misfortune of serving his country during a time of unusual turmoil. Perhaps we need to ask whether to attribute blame to the high degree of hardships the country faced or to the quality of Grant's leadership.

Social psychology tells us that there is a general trend in attributions. When judging other people, we tend to attribute their actions to internal causes. Doing this allows us to predict future behavior: if Julia always laughs at clowns, we know she will laugh at the next clown too. This tendency is called either the Fundamental Attribution Error or the



Correspondence Bias (Jones, 1990; Ross, 1977). It is both strong and pervasive, leading to experimental subjects making misjudgments that are almost embarrassing to even read about. Consider the following: In one study, a person was told to write an essay in favor of a certain subject, such as abortion. Then another person was told to read the essay. Knowing that the writer had been instructed to take the position he took, the reader was then asked what the writer's personal opinion on the subject was. The logical answer to this question—I have no idea!—promotes discomfort. People like to have an idea. So most people decided to attribute the views in the essay to the writer, despite knowing that the writer was told to take the position he did. This effect is remarkably difficult to eliminate. Even when the readers themselves tell the writer to take a particular position, the effect is still present (Gilbert & Jones, 1986).

The earlier works on Grant make such an internal, stable attribution. Gillette (1979) has no problem saying, "Above all, President Grant's confusing policy and contradictory performance, together with Congress' indecision and division, resulted in a lack of direction" (p. 363). McFeely (1981) goes even further, saying that Grant "did not see American Negroes as people to be sympathized with" and that this lack of commitment led directly to the "lassitude" in federal interventions (pp. 32, 70, 71, 425). In a review of McFeely's work, historian C. Vann Woodward said simply, "[Grant] bears a heavy share of the blame for the abandonment of reconstruction" (Woodward, 1981, pp. 3–4, 6; quoted in Simpson, 1987, p. 64). Based on Grant's actions, these historians have no trouble saying what kind of person they think he was. As we saw in Simonton's work, these views have entered into the received wisdom.

The revisionists tell a far different story. For them, Grant is the man who tried, who left things better than they would otherwise have been. This disparity in views could be seen as a reason for despair, an invitation for us to leave Grant's presidency firmly in the world of the subjective. Thankfully, the revisionists are not merely reinterpreting the same evidence as the earlier scholars. Their reworkings of Grant's image are often based on more extensive reviews of the record, a return to original sources, and the correction of occasional inaccuracies. Two reviews of McFeely's biography, once considered the definitive work on Grant, make this plain. After criticizing McFeely's portrayal of Grant's generalship, Princeton historian James McPherson (1981) writes, "It is hard to write a biography of Grant without a thorough understanding of the military history of the Civil War. The large number of careless errors

that have found their way into this book raise doubts about McFeely's understanding of this history" (p. 365). In his article "Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*," Simpson (1987) addresses McFeely's belief that Grant was indifferent to the suffering of both his soldiers and the freedmen. Simpson cites many examples of Grant showing and acting on compassion for both, to the point where his general conclusion is the exact opposite of McFeely's. Factual inaccuracies and questionable sourcing in McFeely's work are once again raised as concerns. Simpson ends his article thus: "Grant's contemporaries would have a difficult time recognizing the man described in McFeely's book. The reader will have to decide whether *Grant* is, in fact, 'truthful history'" (Simpson, 1987, p. 83).

It is hard to imagine the butcher of Cold Harbor being the same man who was sickened by a visit to a makeshift hospital after Shiloh (Simpson, 1987, p. 81). It is hard to think that the man who presided over the end of Reconstruction was also a great friend of Frederick Douglass. It is hard to do these things, but the record increasingly shows that we must, that Grant was a moral man in difficult times.

In the last decade, there has been a move in the Grant scholarship to reevaluate his presidency. Scaturro's *President Grant Reconsidered* puts up a strong fight on Reconstruction policy, especially concerning the aforementioned Mississippi incident. The often neglected, favorable racial motivations behind the attempted annexation of Santo Domingo are also remembered. Grant's scandals are put in perspective. Resolution of the dispute with England over reparations for the *Alabama*, an English-built Confederate commerce raider, is also mentioned as an underrated part of the Grant presidency; what could have resulted in war instead set a firm precedent for international arbitration. Grant's attempts to treat fairly the "original inhabitants of the land," so praised by Frederick Douglass, can also not be forgotten. There is even Grant's rise above party loyalty to help resolve the fiercely contested results of the 1876 election, allowing for a successful and peaceful mediation. Smith's one-volume biography of Grant incorporates many of these themes, as does Bunting's. In terms of Grant's personality, Smith and Bunting echo more recent analyses by Simpson and McPherson; go further back to echo Catton and Foote; and go even further back to echo General James Longstreet, General Richard Ewell, Mark Twain, and Frederick Douglass. Grant was a complicated and silent man, but evaluations of him are changing. As noted in a recent review, "U. S. Grant wasn't only the greatest general—he wasn't a bad president at all" (Baker, 2004, p. 13).



## VI Conclusion

The considerations in this chapter suggest that it is far from clear that Grant's personality is as dismally unsuited for leadership as the received wisdom, distilled by Simonton, suggests. But the fact that the wisdom of 1985 is so different from the wisdom, as we read it, of 2005 raises disturbing questions. Scaturro's 1998 preface indicates that he clings "to the belief that there is in fact a 'pure' history behind much of what history books have distorted." Can there be such a pure history? We are in no position to answer that question. But we do feel that, as more is written and more resources become available—in both the publishing sense and the cognitive sense—a consensual database will be defined. Scholars will be challenged to justify their interpretations of that database and will be induced to move toward more thoughtful individuating interpretations of the evidence and away from simpler schema-driven accounts (cf. Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Then, perhaps, more agreement will emerge. We may never get to that epistemological promised land, but we are optimistic that in the case of Grant, we can move a good distance toward it in the near future.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Should Presidents Obey the Law? (And What Is "The Law," Anyway?)*

FREDERICK SCHAUER<sup>1</sup>

Should presidents obey the law? To many people, the obvious answer to that question is "yes," but perhaps things are not so clear. Although at first blush it seems plain that presidents (and prime ministers, chancellors, and even kings and queens) ought to obey the law, it has not always been so plain in presidential leadership. Consider Abraham Lincoln when, in his first inaugural address, he proposed flouting the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision;<sup>2</sup> or Franklin Roosevelt when he urged Congress to ignore court decisions invalidating New Deal legislation;<sup>3</sup> or Bill Clinton when he led the United States (and NATO) into combat in Kosovo in likely violation of international law;<sup>4</sup> or to Fawn Hall, Oliver North's secretary, when she testified during the Iran-Contra investigation that "sometimes you have to go above the written law, I believe."<sup>5</sup>

These examples are representative rather than exhaustive, and the American political tradition is replete with instances of presidents, cabinet officials, members of Congress, and countless less-exalted officials who have relatively shamelessly taken the position that immoral and at times simply unwise laws need not be considered binding. And in doing so these officials have situated themselves within a post-Nuremberg tradition in which "I was just following the law" is hardly more of a defense to morally wrongful official action than "I was just following orders" is.