

'history is theatre': the secrets
to the success of the Curtin and
Roosevelt mass media strategies,
1941-45¹

how Curtin and Roosevelt developed the allied mass media

The notion that '[h]istory is theatre' affirms the importance of studying films and other cultural products.² This paper delves into rarely viewed press, film, and radio archives to discover the groundbreaking mass media strategies developed by the wartime Australian Prime Minister John Curtin, and United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to persuade journalists and public audiences to support their alliance during World War II (hereafter 'the war').

There is a paucity of comprehensive study into the mass media strategies developed by Curtin and Roosevelt; strategies that give us detailed insight into their partnership. The rapid expansion of new radio and film industries converged with a global conflict at the same time as two popular leaders were elected. Both men, who were skilful communicators known for their commitment to peaceful foreign policies before the war, established precedents for the development of closer press relationships, more interactive news conferences, war newsreels, and radio talks that strengthened their friendships with journalists and helped them to achieve their political aims. The two leaders advanced media innovations to maintain voters' enthusiasm for the Allied 'beat Hitler first' strategy while their electorates were mostly engaged by the war in Asia.

¹ I would like to thank the editors of *Melbourne Historical Journal*. Also I appreciate the support of Associate Professors Bobbie Oliver and Steve Mickler of Curtin University, as well as Lesley Wallace, David Wylie and staff members of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library.

² Greg Dening, "Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay," *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 1.

After the Japanese bombing of the US naval base at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Roosevelt used his ‘fireside chat’ radio talks to reassure national and overseas audiences that the Allies were ‘forming a band of steel’ to defeat their Pacific foes.³ The next year he broadcast stirring rhetoric to overcome public apathy towards protracted Nazi German battles.⁴ When Japanese forces attacked Darwin on 19 February 1942, press editors proclaimed, ‘the war comes home to Australia’ and that this would be the country’s ‘greatest hour’.⁵ Curtin developed communication methods similar to Roosevelt’s media strategies as he tried to persuade Allied populations to accept a ‘certain minimum effort’ to defend Australia as they strove to ‘beat Hitler first’.⁶

The Australian Labor Party Prime Minister was described as a ‘onetime mild-mannered trade-union journalist’, whose words ‘rolled like Walt Whitman’s’ when he addressed US listeners.⁷ He was delivering his nation’s first direct radio broadcast from Canberra to American citizens. Praising ‘the people of America’ during the peak broadcasting time of 7pm to 8pm on Friday 14 March 1942, Curtin spoke of their shared commitment to ‘total warfare’ and the importance of preserving Australia as a democratic ‘bastion’ between the US west coast and Axis enemies. ‘I say to you that the saving of Australia is the saving of America’s west coast’, Curtin asserted during his talk, which was disseminated by more than 700 US radio stations connected to the National Broadcasting Company of America, as well as reaching audiences in the British Isles, Canada, Europe, and South America.⁸ During his direct appeal to Americans, about ninety thousand US servicemen were in Australia.⁹

As Curtin and the Democratic US President governed their nations during political, economic, and social upheavals, they used their journalism backgrounds

³ F. D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat”, *The American Presidency Project* [hereafter *Project*], ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters (24 December 1943), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/news_conferences.php

⁴ Richard W. Steele, “News of the ‘Good War’,” *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (1985).

⁵ *The Age*, 20 February 1942, 2; *The West Australian* [hereafter *WA*], 20 February 1942, 4.

⁶ John Curtin, “Broadcast by the Prime Minister from London,” *Digest* 81 (1944): 53-6.

⁷ *Time*, 23 March 1942, 27. The following 1940s press articles lacked bylines.

⁸ John Curtin, “Broadcast to America,” *Commonwealth Government: Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister (Right Hon. John Curtin)* [hereafter *Digest*] 22 (1942): 9-13. *The Canberra Times* [hereafter *TCT*], 16 March 1942; *WA*, 16 March 1942.

⁹ John Curtin, “Prime Minister’s Review,” *Digest* 81 (1944); and, Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor, “The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia During World War II,” *Journal of Black Studies* 25 (1995): 331-48.

to develop friendly, egalitarian, professional relationships with reporters. Their media associations helped them to win decisive electoral victories as voters supported a war which ‘we are all in’, as Roosevelt remarked.¹⁰ In a letter to Curtin on 3 January 1944, he wrote: ‘[a]s we used to say in my rowing days, Australia is “pulling its weight in the boat”’.¹¹ Early the next year, the news of both their deepening health problems were managed carefully as part of the prevailing censorship systems to prevent publications that might damage public morale or help enemies. Correspondents generally agreed with government demands to withhold the detailed health diagnoses. Therefore the news of Roosevelt’s death on 12 April 1945 was portrayed as ‘sudden and unexpected’ in America; similar reports followed with Curtin’s death in Australia on 5 July in the same year.¹² Japan’s formal surrender took place in September. Although Curtin and Roosevelt had benefited from censorship, they had demonstrated a personal commitment to cultivating positive government-media communications.

allied leaders and precedents in press, film, and radio communications

While scholars have portrayed Curtin as developing Australia’s international standing as an independent nation, biographers have focussed on the young man from the mining town of Creswick, Victoria, and his rapid ascension in his journalism career. Curtin’s journalism skills and media contacts were significant in assisting him to win the federal seat of Fremantle, WA, in November 1928 and then to ascend to the Labor leadership in 1935. After a protracted period of instability between 1939 and early 1941 with four successive Prime Ministers, Curtin was appointed to the Prime Ministership on 7 October 1941.

Although Curtin’s background contrasted with the patrician New York upbringing of Roosevelt, who enjoyed referring to his undergraduate experience as the managing editor and president of his university’s newspaper, *The Harvard Crimson*, Curtin’s press strategies resembled those of the US leader.¹³ Just

¹⁰ F. D. Roosevelt, “Chat,” *Project*, 9 December 1941, 12 October 1942.

¹¹ F. D. Roosevelt, “Letter to John Curtin,” Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (3 January 1944), <http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/vVolume/834A9F0BC9913EAFCA256B7E001E3F3B>.

¹² Australian Prime Minister’s Office, *Scrapbooks compiled by the Prime Minister’s office* [hereafter *Scrapbooks*] 4 (5-6 July 1945); *The Sydney Morning Herald* [hereafter *SMH*], 6 July 1945, 3; and, Megan O’Shaughnessy, “Review of *The Hidden Campaign: Roosevelt’s Health and the 1944 Election*,” by Hugh E. Evans, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003), 793.

¹³ P. M. Boffey, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt at Harvard,” *The Harvard Crimson* (13 December 1957), <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=108910>

as Roosevelt was the first President to employ a full-time press secretary, Curtin appointed Australia's first full-time Prime Ministerial press secretary, Don Rodgers, in 1941.¹⁴ Roosevelt generally conducted twice-weekly news conferences, held at different times to give an equal preference to morning and evening news deadlines during his four Presidential terms. This amounted to 998 interviews during slightly more than 12 years. As he answered journalists' impromptu questions, provided 'off-the-record' and 'background' information, as well as allowed his words to be quoted directly on occasions, the conferences represented a significant departure from the more formal, structured briefings provided by his predecessor, Herbert Hoover.¹⁵ Likewise, Curtin's news interviews were unprecedented in their frequency, openness, and informality in Australia in which he made exceptional provisions for a 'travelling media circus' to accompany him 'everywhere'.¹⁶ He generally held twice-daily media briefings, including weekends.¹⁷ While such highly confidential interviews might not be possible for today's increasingly competitive Parliamentary Press Gallery, wartime correspondents generally honoured Curtin's off-the-record information as part of the prescribed censorship system.¹⁸

Both leaders depended on speechwriters to cultivate their media connections to working-class audiences. Roosevelt often asked for six to eight drafts from his official speechwriter, Samuel Rosenman, and reread the manuscripts so often that he almost memorised them.¹⁹ Although his media statements, articles, and

¹⁴ David Black, "The Art of the Possible: Creating an independent Australian foreign policy 1901-45," John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library [hereafter JCPML], (2004), <http://john.curtin.edu.au/artofthepossible/printessay.html>. Christopher Hubbard, *An Australian Introduction to International Relations* (Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia, 2008); and, Bobbie Oliver, "Shaping the Nation," JCPML (2001), <http://john.curtin.edu.au/shapingthenation/index.htm>. Diana Knott Martinelli and Jeff Mucciarone, "New deal public relations: A glimpse into F.D.R. press secretary Stephen Early's work," *Public Relations Review* 33 (2007): 49-57; Donald K. Rodgers, "Interview by Mel Pratt," JCPML (1971).

¹⁵ Richard M. Perloff, *Political Communication: Politics, Press, and Public in America* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998); and, Harry S. Truman, "The President's News Conference," *Project*, 17 April 1945.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Alexander, "Interview by Mel Pratt," JCPML, np. (1971).

¹⁷ C. J. Lloyd, *Parliament and the Press: The Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, 1901-88* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998); and, Geoffrey Serle, *For Australia and Labor* (Perth: JCPML, 1998).

¹⁸ John Hirst, *Looking for Australia* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2010); and, Lloyd, *Parliament and the Press*.

¹⁹ Earnest Bradenburg and Waldo W. Braden, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt," *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. Marie K. Hochmuth, vol. 3 (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958).

radio talks were prepared by Australian press secretary, Don Rodgers, Curtin too spoke forcefully and at length from memory during his political addresses.²⁰ As Mackenzie King noted, Curtin's diction 'was very good, and his memory quite remarkable' when he spoke to the Canadian Parliament for more than 40 minutes.²¹

Curtin and Roosevelt first met on 25 April in South Carolina at Hobcaw Barony, which was the hunting and fishing lodge of Roosevelt's adviser, Bernard Mannes Baruch. The two leaders met again for a one-and-a-half hour discussion in Washington D.C. on 5 June.²² Afterwards Curtin did not disclose any information about Roosevelt's health problems.²³ During the same era, British Prime Minister, Winston S. Churchill, and Canada's leader, William Lyon Mackenzie King, were also former newspaper journalists who cultivated their media relationships.²⁴ However, neither Churchill nor King held daily news interviews nor did they employ full-time press secretaries during their Prime Ministerships.²⁵ Although relationships between media and wartime leaders of various countries were strong at this time, those formed by Curtin and Roosevelt were particularly well-developed. Curtin and Roosevelt were aided by censorship and developed respectful relationships with correspondents.²⁶

All four Allied leaders enthusiastically embraced the relatively new media of radio and wartime newsreels. Scholars described Roosevelt's radio 'fireside chats' as setting 'the gold standard for American political oratory' because of his ability to project a warm, fatherly persona to voters. Based on different historical accounts, Roosevelt delivered between 25 and 31 'fireside chats' from 3 December 1933 to 6 December 1944.²⁷ In like manner to Roosevelt, the classically educated Churchill turned to the radio as a primary medium to communicate with wartime audiences with his 1941 broadcast to the US Congress being described as 'one of the greatest occasions in history'.²⁸ The diaries of Canada's King

²⁰ Richard Hall, "Spin Doctor," *NLA News* 7 (1998). British Movietone News, *Newsreels of Curtin, 1942-1945* (JCPML, 1942-45).

²¹ W. L. M. King, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 16 December 1944), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/king/index-e.html>, 1 June 1944, 565.

²² *Digest* 81 (1944): 35.

²³ Joseph A. Alexander, "Papers 1833-1957," 1941-44, National Library of Australia [hereafter NLA]; Harold Cox, "Typescript reports, 1944-1964," 1944-45, NLA; and, Clem Lloyd and Richard Hall, eds., *Backroom Briefings: John Curtin's War* (Canberra: NLA, 1997).

²⁴ King, *The Diaries*. Charles E. Lysaght, "Brendan Bracken: The Fantasist Whose Dreams Came True," *Finest Hour* 113 (2001-2).

²⁵ Lloyd, *Press*; and, *Time*, 12 June 1944, JCPML.

²⁶ Alexander, "Interview" and "Papers"; and, Steele, "War".

²⁷ Elvin T. Lim, "The Lion and the Lamb," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 437-64.

²⁸ Alexander, "Papers," 27 December 1941, np.

indicated that he rehearsed speeches carefully before live radio addresses.

For example, on 3 September 1939, he wrote of devoting the entire afternoon to 'work out' his speech about Britain's declaration of war on Germany; this was 'the largest broadcast' made from Canada at the time, reaching listeners 'worldwide'. For King, the radio speeches were vital for persuading French Canadians to support the war in Europe.²⁹ During Curtin's first month in office he initiated the installation of a powerful new shortwave transmitting station that connected Australian radio networks to the US.³⁰ Thereafter he delivered at least five radio talks directly to Americans.³¹ Furthermore he sponsored war newsreels with the U.S. Army Signal Corps during General Douglas MacArthur's Philippines campaign in 1944.³² The media interaction between Australia and America during this time suggests that Roosevelt's innovative use of new media had some influence on Curtin's radio and film strategies.

The close ties between the Australian and American leaders were further highlighted through the media in 1941. In a highly publicised editorial, Curtin gave a New Year message in which he stated: 'Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'.³³ The now bureau chief of *The Herald* at Canberra, Alexander, requested that Curtin write an editorial for his Melbourne-based newspaper.³⁴ Alexander's employer, Sir Keith Murdoch, decided to transfer the copy, originally planned for the magazine pages, and elevate it to the front-page status on the issue of Saturday 27 December 1941.³⁵ In his diary, Alexander referred to 'the immense sensation' caused by Curtin's 'bluntly' worded statement. 'The Sunday Telegraph pinched it and had it today',

²⁹ King, *Diaries*, 3 September 1939, 923, 925; 24 April 1942.

³⁰ *The Canberra Times*, 31 October 1941.

³¹ Curtin's US radio talks were broadcast on 14 March 1942, 26 January 1943, 5 July 1943, 17 March 1944, and, 26 April 1944. JCPML, "Index to John Curtin's speeches," 2007, JCPML.

³² Australian Government Department of Information and U.S. Army Signal Corps, *At The Front: 1939-1945* (JCPML, 1944-5). As a result of Curtin's support of his nation's fledgling film industry, a documentary team won Australia's first Academy Award. The prize was given for the 1942 newsreel *Kokoda Front Line!* that portrayed Australian soldiers fighting on the Kokoda Track, New Guinea. Ken G. Hall, *Kokoda Front Line!* (Australia: Cinesound Productions, 1942). Curtin also appeared in a newsreel of US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's Canberra visit during her five-week tour of the South Pacific in 1943. ScreenSound Australia, *Mrs Roosevelt's Visit To Canberra, 1943* (JCPML, 1943).

³³ John Curtin, "The Task Ahead," *The Herald*, 27 December 1941, 1.

³⁴ Alexander, "Papers," 28 December 1941.

³⁵ David Black, "Menzies and Curtin in World War Two," JCPML (2006), <http://john.curtin.edu.au/ww2leaders>; and, Allan Fraser, "Interview by Mel Pratt," 1972-3, JCPML.

Alexander noted. 'Other Sunday papers gave it great publicity and it is being widely discussed in England ... KM [Keith Murdoch] is very amazed about it'.³⁶ By February 1944, Curtin and Roosevelt had developed a 'very friendly and cooperative relationship', supported by their media communications.³⁷

As US correspondents portrayed Roosevelt's death as a shock, similarly many Australians were reportedly astonished by the loss of Curtin.³⁸ Both nations' citizens seemed genuinely surprised by the news because journalists had cooperated with the two men and censorship policies by avoiding pictures of Roosevelt in his wheelchair or Curtin in a hospital.³⁹ Curtin wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt and the new US President, Harry S. Truman, that Australians were deeply 'shocked' by Roosevelt's death.⁴⁰ Similar statements were made about Curtin after he died. For example, few Sydney residents 'were prepared' for the tragedy, with people quoted as saying they 'didn't think it was so near'.⁴¹ The news was reported as tributes on US dailies' front pages.⁴² By this time, journalists lauded the resolve the two leaders had shown in trying to remain at their posts to help achieve a war victory.

journalist's private papers shed more light on crisis management

There are diaries from an influential Australian federal political journalist and editor, Joseph Alexander, that reveal the inner machinations of the Curtin administration during the Pearl Harbor crisis.⁴³ It seems that no previous author has published research on his diaries as a source of insight into Curtin's mass media policies. Alexander, a Parliamentary Press Gallery reporter and a self-proclaimed member of 'Curtin's Circus' of travelling correspondents, recalled that his diaries were 'roughly written...in my almost unreadable handwriting...while the events described were red-hot in my mind'.⁴⁴ The private notes became a

³⁶ Alexander, "Papers," 28 December 1941, np.

³⁷ Black, "Friendship is a sheltering tree, JCPML (2001), 225.

³⁸ O'Shaughnessy, "Roosevelt's health"; and, *The Daily Mirror*, 5 July 1945; *SMH*, 6 July 1945; and, *Truth*, 8 July 1945.

³⁹ O'Shaughnessy, "Roosevelt's health"; and, *The Herald*, 24 May 1945; and, *SMH*, 14 June 1945.

⁴⁰ John Curtin, "Death Of President Roosevelt," *Digest* 99 (1945): 34.

⁴¹ *SMH*, 6 July 1945, 3.

⁴² *The Chicago-Tribune*, *NYT*, *Post*, 5 July 1945, 1.

⁴³ Alexander donated his diaries to the National Library of Australia between 1944 and 1977. At Alexander's request, the National Library of Australia did not make the collection available publicly until after his wife Catherine's death in 1983.

⁴⁴ Alexander, "Interview" and "Papers," np.

record of Alexander's great esteem for Curtin, untarnished by faulty memory — a potential challenge posed by oral history reminiscences — and free from the influence of hindsight about the leader's legacy.

Curtin's successful news management was exemplified in Alexander's notes about the events leading to the Pearl Harbor disaster. In a diary entry for Friday 5 December 1941, Alexander wrote that he was planning to accompany Curtin on a train journey from Melbourne to Canberra. Immediately before the train's departure, Curtin was delayed by his principal adviser, Frederick Shedden, and the Prime Minister recalled Alexander from his train seat to meet Don Rodgers at the Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, where the bipartisan Advisory War Council often met. Alexander noted confidentially that, 'Rodgers warned us to be ready for the gravest development' because the Prime Minister had received 'grave news from America'. He affirmed, 'we are on the brink of war with Japan' and he needed to work 'on call over the whole weekend'. The tense atmosphere eased because of Roosevelt's 'personal appeal' to Japanese Emperor Hirohito and, as Alexander opined, 'the feeling is that nothing will happen until the message is received but the Japanese attitude continues to be bad'.⁴⁵

While Curtin stayed at the inexpensive, austere, and non-licensed 'Victoria Palace' in Little Collins Street, the reporters spent 'a very dreary week-end' at the old Oriental Hotel.⁴⁶ Melbourne was twenty hours ahead of Hawai'i's local time. Throughout Sunday night on 7 December, world radio news 'flashes' were relayed to the 'Listening Post' of the Australian Department of Information and then forwarded to Curtin's hotel room. The next morning at 5.30am, a monitor picked up the 'flash' that '[t]he Japanese...have now attacked Pearl Harbor'. Immediately the news was repeated to a Prime Ministerial staff member in another room near Curtin. He and a typist began a long series of telephone calls. By 6.30am, Alexander received a message from Rodgers about the bombing. Alexander's colleagues were informed of the tragedy by 7.30am.⁴⁷

In fact, Japanese forces invaded Malaya and Thailand virtually simultaneously with the assault on the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour. They also bombed Guam, Hong Kong, and Wake Island. Alexander's diaries showed his support for

⁴⁵ Alexander, "Papers," 5-7 December 1941, np.

⁴⁶ Harold Cox, "Harold Cox interview", transcript np.

⁴⁷ *Truth*, 6 December 1942, from *Scrapbooks*, np.

Australia's right to make an independent declaration of war on Japan because such a declaration may:

make us a better people or may it reawaken that sense of spiritual values, dead or dormant, without which this country can never survive...There is a general sense of relief in one sense, in that we know where we stand with Japan. I hear it everywhere...what most felt to be inevitable.⁴⁸

It appeared 'Curtin's Circus' honoured this 'off-the-record' agreement: The disaster was reported as a 'surprise attack' by reputable international media.⁴⁹ In Australia, Curtin continuously communicated with journalists about the imminent crisis.

multimethod approaches

To investigate the two leaders' journalism strategies more closely, this study has focused on their media management of reports in particular radio broadcasts on the Pearl Harbor bombing which led to the Australian and US declarations of war on Japan in December 1941. The broad theoretical and conceptual approaches have been derived from media and journalism studies combined with archival research methods developed in the discipline of history. A comparison will be made between Curtin and Roosevelt's radio broadcasts, and subsequent Australian press coverage. This press analysis has been based on the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism formula that a news article would be deemed 'positive' if two-thirds of the statements appeared to support a national leader.⁵⁰ Given the limited availability of fledgling Australian public opinion polls, one way to ascertain whether Curtin, as well as Roosevelt, was a successful journalism strategist would be to investigate whether newspaper editors favourably repeated the respective leaders' messages.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Alexander, "Papers," 8 December 1941, np.

⁴⁹ BBC News, *Japanese planes bomb Pearl Harbor* (7 December 1941), http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/7/newsid_3494000/3494108.stm

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, "Winning The Media Campaign," *Journalism.org* (2008), <http://www.journalism.org/node/13314>; and, Public Broadcasting Service, *Experts Assess President Obama's Strategy With Media* (2008), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june09/obama_06-24.html

⁵¹ Roy Morgan Research conducted Australia's first major opinion polls in 1941. Michele Levine and Gary Morgan, "The Power of Newspaper Editorial & Advertising," (2006), www.roymorgan.com

Since they addressed radio listeners when they made their Pacific War announcements, this study conducted a computer-aided, quantitative analysis to measure the leaders' speaking rates and readability statistics to assess the effectiveness of their public communications. Recommendations varied on this matter of public speech, with some scholars advising a languid pace of one hundred words per minute while other authors advocated 125 words per minute.⁵² As part of the analysis, the Flesch readability score was calculated for the Curtin and Roosevelt speeches. The Flesch readability score spanned a hundred-point scale, with a higher score indicating the speech included simple language. A lower score implied the speech was more complex. The standard recommended writing score was between sixty and seventy. Although Rudolph Flesch developed his readability formula as a doctoral thesis in 1943, Allied governments might have been aware of the scholarly attempts to simplify the expression of the English language.⁵³ Furthermore this quantitative analysis was expanded to include the Flesch-Kincaid score, which ranked documents on a US school grade level. The recommended Flesch-Kincaid score for most public documents was about eight, close to the reading level of 'middle-brow' newspapers and suitable for an eighth-grade student.⁵⁴ These methods were used to determine the accessibility of the Curtin and Roosevelt speeches.

An investigation of selected photographs and newsreels was undertaken using Asa Berger's semiotic film conventions to examine whether the visual images depicted Curtin and Roosevelt as heroic, dynamic, and strong leaders.⁵⁵ Through this new examination of rarely viewed primary sources, official and informal communication texts, oral histories and a comparative press analysis, this study found that, overall, the Australian media positively portrayed the leaders, along with their Pacific foreign policies.

setting media agendas on the 'new war'

Curtin's determination to involve Australian audiences in wartime discussions was evidenced by his radio broadcast to declare war on 8 December 1941.

⁵² Peter Kenny, *A Handbook of Public Speaking for Scientists and Engineers* (London: IOP Publishing Ltd., 1988); and, Lim, "Lion".

⁵³ Louis J. Sirico Jr., "Readability Studies: How Technocentrism Can Compromise Research and Legal Determinations," *Villanova University School of Law, School of Law Working Paper Series* 104 (2008): <http://law.bepress.com/villanovalwps/papers/art104>

⁵⁴ Trevor Day, "Twelve Writing Tips for Administrative Staff," University of Bath (2008), <http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/resources/TwelveWritingTipsRevisedTD.pdf>

⁵⁵ Anders Hansen, et al., *Mass Communication Research Methods* (Basingstone: Macmillan Press, 1998).

By announcing the full-scale Pacific battle to national listeners, he initiated Australia's first independent declaration of war in this original broadcast.⁵⁶ A limited content analysis of the speech text was made to identify keywords. Curtin appealed to a sense of national identity, greeting his listeners by saying, 'men and women of Australia'. Along with his references to the country, he repeated keywords about democracy, freedom, and liberty, which were familiar from Roosevelt's earlier rhetoric.⁵⁷ Although Roosevelt did not use these specific terms in his radio address on 8 December 1941, he attempted to instil hope in his listeners by talking of 'righteous might', 'absolute victory', 'confidence', 'determination', and 'triumph'.⁵⁸ At the beginning of Curtin's broadcast, it was clear that he was talking to 'the people' — rather than to other politicians and Allied leaders — and frequently used 'we', 'us', and 'our' that supported his inclusive tone.⁵⁹ This strategy resembled the approach taken by Roosevelt in his Pearl Harbor announcement and 'fireside chats', which always began with some variant of a greeting to 'My Friends'.⁶⁰ Curtin also appeared to take care to make impersonal references to 'Japan', 'the enemy', and the war. He appealed to a sense of unity by affirming, 'the common cause of preserving for free men and free women not only their inheritance, but every hope they have of decency and dignity and liberty'. Through its identification with 'free men and free women' and the impersonal characterisation of a 'ruthless and wanton' aggressor, Curtin's rhetoric was similar to Roosevelt's oratory.⁶¹

Both leaders made last-minute amendments to their speeches which resonated with audiences during the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attacks. When Curtin was about to make his evening radio broadcast, he decided to include a brief quotation from the radical republican and Victorian English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne's *The Eve Of Revolution*. The citation concluded his speech and 'caused great interest among his friends'.⁶² He seemed to believe in the persuasive power of poetry to stir the Australian people to accelerate

⁵⁶ Alexander, "Interview"; Don Whittington, *Strive to be Fair* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977); and, Oliver "Shaping the Nation".

⁵⁷ John Curtin, "National Broadcast by Prime Minister," *Digest* 10 (1941): 19-22; and, "Universal Studios, Roosevelt newsreels," (30 September 1934, 1938): <http://www.archive.org/details/WorldHistoryFranklinD.Roosevelt-SixFiresideChats1933-1938>

⁵⁸ F. D. Roosevelt, "Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum (1941): <http://docs.RooseveltLibrary.marist.edu/oddec7.html>

⁵⁹ Curtin, "National Broadcast," 19-22.

⁶⁰ Lim, "Lion," 453.

⁶¹ Curtin, "National Broadcast," 19-22; and, F. D. Roosevelt, "Joint Address to Congress".

⁶² *The Herald*, 9 December 1941, from *Scrapbooks*, np.

wartime production in defence of their country. The Prime Minister ‘wrote the quotation from memory a few minutes before his broadcast began, because he thought it peculiarly appropriate as an invocation to the Australian people’, according to an anonymous *Herald* journalist.⁶³ In the article, Curtin was praised for ‘his stirring appeal’ and for choosing Swinburne’s five lines because of their ‘remarkable application to modern aerial warfare’.⁶⁴ On the same date as the Australian broadcast, Roosevelt delivered his radio address in the US Congress at 12.30pm and, for the first time, a President was directly including national listeners in his request for a declaration of war. He used his ‘reading copy’ of a typewritten draft that included his revisions. Roosevelt changed his critical first line about the bombings by replacing the phrase, ‘a date which will live in world history’, with the stronger description, ‘a date which will live in infamy’, to intensify the sense of Allied outrage at Japan’s military government.⁶⁵ While historians recognised the important role of speechwriters to enhance the two leaders’ popularity, Curtin and Roosevelt developed reputations for their eloquent, original writing styles when preparing citizens for the Pacific War. Using the aforementioned quantitative analysis, this study calculated that Curtin’s radio address registered a Flesch readability score of 57.4, fairly close to the recommended public speaking standard of sixty to seventy.⁶⁶ Roosevelt’s speech was more complex, registering 45.5 (the lower number indicating a more difficult text), perhaps because he addressed the Congress as well as radio listeners. His ‘fireside chats’ were an average score of 57.5; altogether Roosevelt’s other public addresses were an average of 59.4. Therefore Curtin’s declaration of war resembled Roosevelt’s ‘fireside chats’ in terms of the rhetoric, the level of accessibility and reading ease.⁶⁷

On the Flesch-Kincaid scale, Curtin’s radio text was 9.4, meaning it was appropriate for ninth graders.⁶⁸ Although the speech was slightly more complicated than the recommended eighth-grade level, it was not unreasonably high given Australia’s compulsory education system, when the statutory leaving age was

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ US National Archives and Records Administration, ‘Teaching with Documents’ (2009), <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/day-of-infamy> (retrieved on 23 March 2010).

⁶⁶ Curtin, “National Broadcast”; and, Lim, “Lion”.

⁶⁷ Curtin, “National Broadcast”; Lim, “Lion”; and, F. D. Roosevelt, “Joint Address to Congress”.

⁶⁸ Curtin, “National Broadcast”.

fourteen in 1941.⁶⁹ On average, Australians born before 1930 completed 9.3 years of schooling.⁷⁰ My study suggests that Curtin deliberately aimed his address at working-class listeners. Roosevelt's broadcast was more complex, with a Flesch-Kincaid score of 11.5, meaning it was suitable for eleventh-grade students. Since Roosevelt addressed politicians as well as workers, he named specific Pacific locations that were bombed during the "surprise offensive" to persuade his diverse audiences to support a declaration of war.⁷¹

Both leaders seemed to know how to deliver their oratory at an effective pace for their target audiences. During his broadcast, Curtin spoke 119.4 words per minute.⁷² His speech rate in the thirteen-minute talk was fairly close to prescribed standards that ranged between one hundred and one hundred and twenty-five words a minute.⁷³ After developing a reputation as a 'street corner speaker' in his youth, when he was actually a very fast communicator, Curtin talked calmly with Australians in his radio address.⁷⁴ In comparison, Roosevelt spoke for six minutes and was reportedly interrupted by 'wild and thunderous applause and cheers' in the joint session of Congress.⁷⁵ Therefore he spoke 86.6 words a minute; his pauses emphasised the drama and import of his words.⁷⁶ On average, Roosevelt's speaking rate during the 'fireside chats' was calculated to be 117 words a minute.⁷⁷ While Roosevelt's speech was more complicated than Curtin's broadcast, both leaders appeared to speak more slowly than they normally did to emphasise their inclusive, democratic keywords about hope, unity and a strong defence.

In like manner to Roosevelt's newsreels for 'average' men and women, Curtin spoke directly to the camera to address cinema audiences.⁷⁸ In an Australian Cinesound Productions film, Curtin used the same keywords about a war for

⁶⁹ S. R. Carver, *Year Book Australia, 1941* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1942), <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/1301.01941?OpenDocument>

⁷⁰ Jonathan Kelley and M. D. R. Evans, "Trends In Educational Attainment In Australia," *WwA: Worldwide Attitudes* (1996), http://www.international-survey.org/wwa_pub/articles/hst-ed5.htm

⁷¹ F. D. Roosevelt, "Joint Address to Congress".

⁷² Curtin, "National Broadcast".

⁷³ Kenny, *A Handbook of Public Speaking*; and, Lim, "Lion".

⁷⁴ Bobbie Oliver, *Unity is Strength: A History of the Australian Labour Party and the Trades and Labour Council in Western Australia, 1899-1999* (Perth: API Network, 2003), 66; and, *The Herald* 4 October, 1941, from *Scrapbooks*, np.

⁷⁵ *The Argus*, 10 December 1941, 5.

⁷⁶ F. D. Roosevelt, "Joint Address to Congress".

⁷⁷ Lim, "Lion".

⁷⁸ Universal Studios, "Newsreels" (30 September 1934).

freedom, liberty, and 'civilisation'. Newsreel commentator, Peter Bathurst, told moviegoers that, '[r]ight up to the outbreak of this colossal war, too many of our experts of our time depreciated the value of air power'.⁷⁹ Curtin was portrayed as the film's hero, who indicated his open, honest manner by raising his hands and placing them on the table where he was seated before he announced: 'we are face to face with the struggle for sheer existence'.⁸⁰ To strengthen the impact of his words, the camera crew moved to a close-up shot while he declared the upcoming 1941 Christmas season 'will be a period of a stern, ruthless war' that did not allow 'holiday making'.⁸¹ Contrasting with the 'depreciated' war effort commentary, he persuasively addressed 'men and women here in the homeland' as his colleagues and asked them to 'keep the workshops active, to maintain the stream of munitions to our gallant fighting forces. I say to you: You must not waste one single hour or even one single minute'. As the camera returned to a medium shot, he continued describing his objective to maintain Australia as 'a free citadel for the people' and 'an outpost for civilisation'.⁸² These camera techniques were similar to those used by Roosevelt during his 1930s 'fireside chats' newsreels, when he spoke directly to the camera at eye level, with his hands placed on the table before him to signify his straightforward manner and a candid connection with his audiences. Also Roosevelt was framed in close-up and medium shots to convey a personal relationship with US moviegoers.⁸³ Both leaders seemed to have approved of film techniques that emphasised their direct communications to working-class moviegoers.

Their visual images contrasted in other ways. As a Labor leader, Curtin 'deliberately had his suits cut very conservatively' to evoke 'a very serious appearance'.⁸⁴ Newspaper photographs and films frequently showed him in a stiff, white collar, plain ties, dark waistcoat, matching jacket and hat. His 'austere' style was noticed by Australia's *Sunday Sun* 'FACT Canberra Correspondent', who wrote light-heartedly that he was not concerned about clothes rationing because he had 'never been a fancy dresser'.⁸⁵ 'Honest John' Curtin's reputation appeared to resonate with many 1940s American

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cinesound Productions, *War in Pacific!* (JCPML, 1941).

⁸³ Universal Studios, "Newsreels" (1933, 28 June 1934).

⁸⁴ Rodgers, "Interview," np.

⁸⁵ *The Sunday Sun*, JCPML (14 June 1942), <http://john.curtin.edu.au/behindthescenes/ms/text/curtin.html>; and, *Time*, 24 April 1944, JCPML.

audiences and his picture as well as an accompanying 'boxing kangaroo' icon appeared on a *Time* 1944 magazine cover, for instance.⁸⁶ Moreover US magazine companies used his image in their advertisements, including posters in New York subway cars.⁸⁷ Curtin's cultivated appearance as a 'man of the people' differed from international media images of Roosevelt with his cigarette holder, aristocratic *pince-nez* glasses and open convertible.⁸⁸

In Australia, newspaper editors portrayed the Curtin and Roosevelt broadcasts on the Pacific War positively. On 9 December 1941, Curtin's radio talk was publicised as 'vital' on page one of *The Sydney Morning Herald*; as 'important' on the cover of *The Age*; as well as announcing '[d]rastic plans' and 'a total war footing' in *The Canberra Times*.⁸⁹ His speech was reproduced almost verbatim in *The Sydney Morning Herald*; likewise his keywords were reported substantially in *The Age*, *The Canberra Times* and *The West Australian*.⁹⁰ All four newspapers included supportive 'leaders' — also known as editorial comments — headlines and smaller articles related to the broadcast. 'The Prime Minister knows how and where Australian interests have to be protected', *The Canberra Times* leader writer stated.⁹¹ Curtin 'has developed the qualities of real leadership' by 'acting with promptitude and energy', *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial writer commented.⁹² In a front-page article, *The Canberra Times* recognised Australia was involved in a new war, a new world order — another keyword in the radio speech — that needed the support of 'everyone' in the nation.⁹³ Moreover, positive editorials appeared in another six metropolitan dailies across the nation.⁹⁴ While it was not surprising that a violent battle would receive wide media attention, it was unusual that several conservative Australian publishers would endorse a Labor leader. By emphasising Curtin's keywords of nationhood, the Australian people and war, the editors conveyed a sense of civic duty and desire for national unity.

⁸⁶ *Time*, 23 August 1943, 30 August 1943, 24 April 1944, JCPML, np.

⁸⁷ *Mirror*, from *Scrapbooks*, 9 October 1942.

⁸⁸ Granada Media, *Roosevelt* (JCPML, 1990); and, Screensound Australia, "A Great Australian Passes," *John Joseph Curtin 1885-1945* (JCPML, 1945).

⁸⁹ *SMH*, *The Age*, *TCT*, 9 December 1941, 1.

⁹⁰ *WA*, 9 December 1941, 6.

⁹¹ *TCT*, 9 December 1941, 2.

⁹² *SMH*, 9 December 1941, 6.

⁹³ *TCT*, 9 December 1941, 1; 12 December 1941, 1.

⁹⁴ *The Argus*, *The Courier-Mail*, *Mirror*, *The Herald*, *The Mercury*, *The Sun*, from *Scrapbooks*, December 1941, np.

Likewise Roosevelt's broadcast generated favourable press coverage in three selected Australian newspapers.⁹⁵ Australian newspaper readers were told that he spoke in 'firm, ringing tones' with 'a note of implacable determination'.⁹⁶ During their regular news interviews, Roosevelt and Curtin briefed journalists about the US naval losses at Pearl Harbor; reporters co-operated with censorship policies by withholding the information.⁹⁷ Although Curtin and Roosevelt were aided by this suppression of news, they secured journalists' support through their use of regular, open and informal briefings, their inspiring rhetoric, as well as their successful use of radio and film.

As Prime Minister, Curtin made forty broadcasts and possibly more radio talks during his terms from 7 October 1941 to 5 July 1945.⁹⁸ Therefore this study has calculated that he made about twelve significant Prime Ministerial radio talks each year. In the US, Roosevelt delivered his 110 Presidential radio speeches from 4 March 1933 to 12 April 1945.⁹⁹ Thus Roosevelt made about nine radio talks each year during his Presidential terms. Australia's leader talked more frequently to radio listeners than Roosevelt, who was well known for his ready acceptance and use of media technology.

While Australian polling was new in 1941 and media organisations had not yet developed sophisticated, interactive tools to measure public opinions, some readers wrote 'letters to the editor' and similar correspondence to affirm they had changed their anti-Labor allegiances and supported Curtin.¹⁰⁰ After Roosevelt's 'day of infamy' speech, US navy, army and marine headquarters reportedly 'were besieged with volunteers', seeking to enlist for military service.¹⁰¹

By January 1942, Roosevelt's public approval rating was 84 per cent and another survey found 73 per cent of respondents approved his handling of

⁹⁵ *The Argus*, TCT, SMH, 10 December 1941.

⁹⁶ *The Argus*, 10 December 1941, 5.

⁹⁷ Alexander, "Papers," 10-16 December 1941; F. D. Roosevelt, "Conference," *Project* 17 February 1942; Cox, "Interview by Mel Pratt," 1973, JCPML; F. D. Roosevelt, "Conference," *Project*, 9 December 1941; and, Steele, "War".

⁹⁸ John Curtin, "Speech re Defence Policy and the Brisbane Line," 1943, JCPML; "Speeches", JCPML; and, 'Prime Minister's itinerary', 1943, CA12, A461, R4/1/12, 117, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA].

⁹⁹ Lim, "Lion".

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, "Papers," 10 August 1943; T. Hodgkinson, 4 July 1943, P/S.047, JCPML; J.J. Mulligan correspondence, 31 December 1942, January 1943, CA 12, M1415, 237, NAA; and, *The Age*, 11 December 1942, 4.

¹⁰¹ *SMH*, TCT, 10 December 1941, 1.

foreign policy in May 1943.¹⁰² The next year he was elected to an unprecedented fourth Presidential term. In an Australian survey, eight out of ten voters said they 'were satisfied or more than satisfied with Curtin's job as Prime Minister' in August 1942.¹⁰³ During the 1943 Federal election, Curtin won 66.9 per cent of the votes in his Fremantle electorate. Some 78 per cent of Australians supported his leadership.¹⁰⁴ These types of polls indicated the leaders' mass media strategies were successful in attracting broad support from both the left and the right of the political spectrum.

media visionaries paved the way for current political communications

By developing unique journalism strategies, Roosevelt and Curtin established precedents in political communication. These innovations included the role of the full-time press secretary, informal, 'off-the-record' news briefings, as well as using relatively new electronic media to connect with national and overseas audiences. Their use of visual strategies, dramatic rhetoric, and rehearsed gestures enabled Curtin and Roosevelt to represent themselves in popular media culture as being both forceful leaders and democratic 'men of the people'.

Through the case study of the news management of the Pearl Harbour bombing, this article compared the Curtin and Roosevelt journalism strategies to identify their unique qualities and discover lessons for modern-day political communications. Although written hastily amid the chaos of war, Joseph Alexander's diaries opened new views of Curtin's unique, day-to-day interactions with journalists, particularly his confidential warnings about the imminent Pearl Harbor disaster. Such close relations between an Australian Prime Minister, press secretary and journalists were unprecedented. While Roosevelt and Curtin benefited from wartime censorship, they also secured many reporters' cooperation by developing egalitarian, respectful relationships.

Perhaps because both leaders had some experience in newspaper journalism, they skilfully used the relatively new media of radio and newsreels to communicate their common Pacific War objectives to mass audiences. Through their gestures, direct addresses to the film camera, and rhetorical appeals to the 'average' person in close-up, eye-level shots, they conveyed a friendly, warm and

¹⁰² George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1972).

¹⁰³ *The Courier-Mail*, from *Scrapbooks*, 14 August 1942, np.

¹⁰⁴ *Time*, 23 August 1943, JCPML.

personal relationship with moviegoers. Even though they relied on speechwriters, they added original amendments that seemed to amplify their war messages effectively, based on the positive press coverage of their statements in selected metropolitan Australian newspapers. Although their speeches were higher than recommended reading levels, they reflected similar keywords and inclusive language about hope, nationhood and defence to inspire their nations to protect Australia. Curtin seemed to slow his speech rate deliberately in his radio broadcast while Roosevelt's measured, reassuring pace belied his anger. Opinion polls and the evaluation of press coverage indicated both leaders were successful in persuading many journalists and public audiences to accept their war aims.

Roosevelt and Curtin set journalism precedents still used today, even with the greater turnover of news, the faster media cycle and the extra demands on journalists and politicians. Their innovative styles created a legacy evident in contemporary political communications. Political leaders can generate favourable news coverage by talking informally, openly, and frequently to journalists, by using the latest technology to communicate to public audiences at home and overseas, along with focusing on positive policies to achieve their objectives of setting media agendas.

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