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THE WHITE HOUSE DERBY: HORSE-RACE JOURNALISM AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

A Political Science Honors Thesis

by

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To Professor Eric R.A.N. Smith (Advisor)

and

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"AS IRON SHARPENS IRON, SO ONE MAN SHARPENS ANOTHER."
Proverbs 27:17

My heartfelt thanks to all of those who have suffered along with me through this - euphemistically speaking - experience of my thesis, both personally and academically. Thanks go to "Dad's computer repair 24-hour hotline" (I don't why its doing it, Dad, it just is), and to Mom's magic red pen. And a special thank you to my roommates/therapists/friends, Tina and Diane, who have put up with the steady drum of the computer interupted only by my screams, my complaining, and my whining. Thank you for correcting me when I needed it and lying to me when I'd already printed the final copy. Thanks for putting up with my wild mood swings and the streams of computer paper that at times engulfed the apartment. You have sharpened me in more ways than you will know.

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INTRODUCTION

"Television and Elections" was the vague notion I had on what I wanted to research for this thesis. Having no more developed thought than that, I did what every good student of political science does, I read. I read about television's structure. I read content analysis studies of news coverage. I read theories of media effects. I read about momentum and Iowa and New Hampshire and game coverage and polls and believability. I read a lot. I learned a lot. I would like to share this new-found knowledge with you.

I found that the structure and needs of television effect the type of coverage that presidential elections receive. I also found that the overriding need for pleasing visual images and brief interesting stories forces the media, especially television, to use themes to organize the news. Furthermore, I discovered that the theme of horse-race journalism permeates the coverage of elections. Research showed that the extensive coverage that Iowa and New Hampshire receive can be explained because they satisfy the needs of the media. I also found that the effects of horse-race journalism are profound in the early primary stage of the campaign because the media, not the voters, are the selective power which narrows the field of candidates. And finally I determined that the theory of agenda-setting effects of the media explains this phenomenon.

I also found that the things I wanted to be true often were not. For instance, I wanted television coverage and

effects to be very different from newpaper coverage and effects. That dichotomy simply did not exist. The fact is that most Americans rely on both print and broadcast media for political information. Therefore, most of the content analysis studies I will quote from, study both the network news and the major newspapers.

I found that the topic of media and elections is an immense one. I narrowed the scope of this paper to deal with just one aspect. There are several areas I do not broach which are related to this topic. For instance, it would be interesting to compare the content of press coverage before the era of television to that of a television-centered campaign. It would be interesting to study the candidates role in the type of coverage the campaign receives. It would also be interesting to study the notion of democracy, and if media campaigns enable or inhibit a democratic election. I studied none of these aspects although they are directly related.

Instead, I assert that horse-race journalism is the predominant theme of campaign coverage, hence the title "The White House Derby." It is especially pronounced on television but apparent in newspapers as well. The first chapter explains the structure and effects of television and how these needs force the medium to rely upon themes. The second chapter explores the theme of horse-race journalism. Here it is defined and the three elements of the theme are discussed: conflict, expectations and polls.

The third chapter looks at the first delegate selection events, Iowa and New Hampshire, and attempts to blend the notion of television's structural needs, the horse-race theme, and the agenda-setting theory as a way of explaining the over-coverage of these events. Finally, chapter five looks at possible, although not probable, alternatives to the situation.

This thesis is an attempt to synthesize many separate studies into one argument. I do not use any of my own primary research or content analysis studies. If I had more time and money, I would develop my own research but, for this task I rely on the primary research of others.

The subject of media and elections is as fascinating as it is relevant to the student of political science. The media's role in presidential campaigns has continued to increase steadily. It is now believed to be the key to a winning election. How the media functions effects the candidates, the campaign, and the voters in complex and uneasily understood ways. The study of media and elections is complex because the variables are so numerous but the study must continue as students of political science attempt to understand the complexities of human relations.

CHAPTER 1

A LOOK AT THE RACETRACK

The Structure and Effects of Television

In the age of television, millions of Americans spend hours each day glued to that medium nicknamed the "vast wasteland" and the "boob tube." Television offers entertainment and companionship in a passive form. The average American household watches the television for six hours each day. During those hours that the television is on, sometime between "Oprah!" and "Wheel of Fortune," the network nightly news is aired. Over eighty percent of Americans rely on these nightly news programs for at least part of their political information (Graber, 1984). While "Oprah!" attempts to entertain by presenting interesting guests to America, and "Wheel of Fortune" hopes to amuse and gain viewers with a catchy game show, so too the network news programs hope to increase the numbers of viewers by presenting the news in an entertaining way.

Modern scholars have rejected the "mirror model" of newsmaking which proposes that news is a mirrored reflection of reality. Instead, the "professional model" of newsmaking appears much more realistic. This model asserts that news is an "endeavor of highly skilled professionals who put together an entertaining collage of events selected for importance, attractiveness to media audiences, and balance among various elements of the news offering" (Graber, 1984). Thus, news is presented to America in a way that will best

profit the newsmaking organizations. Network news programs, like all network television programs, are organized by ratings and the ability to attract advertising money.

In the last thirty years the importance of television coverage of the presidential elections has increased dramatically to the point where many believe it is the key to a winning election. As one source states, "In the new electronic democracy, television is the force that shapes the process through which voters select their president" (Oreskes 1988:1). Presidential elections are covered extensively by network news programs for as long as two-to-three years before each election. One reason that presidential elections are covered so extensively is, of course, because of the importance to the American political system. But perhaps equally important, campaigns are covered because they make remarkably "good" television.

Good television is defined by one expert as its ability to meet the following five criteria for a good news story: high impact; violence, conflict, disaster or scandal; familiarity; closeness to home; timeliness and novelty (Graber, 1984). Campaigns inherently possess many of these criteria. And news organizations, as well as candidates, emphasize the events of the campaign that have these five elements. One author writes, "Elections overflow with real or contrived drama, contain conflict (usually with two principle sides), recur at specified times (thus facilitating the logistics of coverage over the year), and have measurable

outcomes - votes and victors" (Paletz, 1981). Thus, the elements of good television synchronize nicely with the characteristics of presidential campaigns.

THE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF TELEVISION

Visual Images

Television news is organized to use the particular strengths of the television medium. For instance, television is different from print media because it is a visual medium able to reach millions of people quickly with the same image and message. Studies have shown that it is a more potent stimulus than print media for stirring emotions and creating vivid mental pictures (Graber, 1984). Similarily television news programs structure coverage in a specific way that emphasizes visual images. There are numerous characteristics of television network news that are unique to the medium and result in a different type of coverage than print sources.

Perhaps the most important of these characteristics is the need for attractive and interesting pictures. The foremost research expert on media and elections, Doris Graber writes that this emphasis has an influence on the coverage of presidential campaigns:

> During political campaigns, motorcades, rallies, hecklers, and cheering crowds make good pictures. Candidates delivering speeches are visually dull in comparison. Television cameras, therefore, concentrate on the colorful scenes rather than on the speechmaker (1984).

The actual importance of the specific event may have very little to do with its ability to get covered on the news.

For instance, a presidential candidate may give a speech to a small group of influential local politicans where he releases an important policy plan, and then wave to a crowd in a small town parade. You can bet that the wave, a more pleasing visual image, will be the event shown on the evening news. Hence, the result is that visually appealing images make the news regardless of their intrinsic importance.

Thus, the need for pleasing visual images in order to get coverage has led to a phenomenon called the pseudo-event. According to political scientists Dan Nimmo and Maxwell Combs, a pseudo-event can be defined as an event "that is planned for the immediate purpose of being reported, yet what actually happens is never clear...In sum, pseudo-events are media events" (1984:164). Pseudo-events in presidential campaigns usually take the form of pictures with crowds, unions, babies, old people, farmers, the American flag, baseball teams - any event that is visually appealing and that usually contains an image which connotes patriotism or the American way of life.

The use of pseudo-events is twofold: they make nice pictures and are easy to report. For this reason, pseudo-events constitute an amazing seventy percent of all stories reported by television news (Graber, 1984).

The need for pleasing visual images has another consequence in the type of candidate that is successful. Increasingly, a candidate needs to be telegenic; that is the candidate must be comfortable and attractive on television.

Nearly every losing candidate, from Nixon in 1960 until Dukakis in 1988, has blamed the media for their loss. Most blame their inability to communicate and manipulate successfully over this medium. Certainly, there is some truth in this assertion; however, a politican does not gain his party's nomination without showing himself to be adept at handling the media. Instead, the true effect of telegenicity occurs at a much eariler stage in the campaign than the general election.

The importance of being telegenic is especially pronounced in the recruitment of candidates in the pre-primary period. "Political recruiters," Graber states, "have become extremely conscious of a candidate's ability to look impressive and to perform well before the cameras. People who are not telegenic have been eliminated from the pool of available recruits." (1984) Many speculate that Presidents Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt would not have been successful if running for office today, because they were either unphotogenic or did not present the type of image successful on television.

Hence, the emphasis on visuals, due to the structure of television, results in a need for visually attractive news stories. News organizations achieve this by a reliance on pseudo-events. A related consequence is the need for a telegenic candidate in order to be successful in television campaign coverage.

Time Constraints

Television network news is bound by time contraints. All three evening news programs are one half-hour in length; however, the half-hour network newscast actually affords only twenty-two minutes for news, the remaining time being consumed by commercials, titles, and introductory matter (Brown 1977:114). Therefore a news story is usually only a few minutes in length, making it difficult for the medium to cover complex stories.

Due to the time constraints, television news has rarely been more than a headline service. It is simply incapable of devoting the same amount of detail and background information as print media. A story that may run in the newspaper in 800 - 1000 words is delivered in 20 - 30 seconds on television. An illustration of the brevity of the newscast was done by CBS Evening News, which set an entire half-hour newscast in columns of type and found that the words scarcely covered half the front page of the New York Times (Brown 1977:117).

Due to the brevity of each story, television journalists attempt to break down the complex activity into familiar, easily understood terms that can be conveyed in a short amount of time. Network news has traditionally avoided economic or international news events, because they require long verbal explanations and are not easily and briefly described by pictorial displays. The exception is, of course, the coverage of international news that deals with

coups, earthquakes, wars, disasters, riots etc. which are reported in reference to the event (i.e. how many killed) not the process behind the event. At any rate, the network news has focused primarily on national politics and personalities, thus becoming almost ideally suited to the publicity needs of presidential aspirants. Since 1964, the network news was lengthened from fifteen minutes to the thirty minutes in 1963, the network evening news programs have been the major target of the candidates campaign activities (Patterson 1980:5).

This results in a reliance upon the familiar. There is a demand for stories that involve familiar people and events and are close to home, which results in the circular nature of the news. Familiar people and situations are covered minutely which makes them even more familiar, and therefore, more worthy of publicity. One scholar notes that there are "fewer than fifty politicians in the news regularly. Incumbent presidents are covered regardless of what they do. News about presidential candidates ranks next. In presidential election years, it often outnumbers stories about the president" (Graber 1980:88). The reverse is also true. In the 1976 campaign, Senators Hubert H. Humphrey and Edward M. Kennedy, who were frequently in the news, became candidates in many people's minds even though they never entered the race offically. Senators Lloyd Benson and Fred Harris, offical entrants, received less media attention and remained unfamiliar (Graber 1980:91). The 1988 race was

similar in the reporting of Mario Cuomo, Governor of New York, even though he repeatedly announced his intention to stay out of the race. Thus, familiar characters may be over-reported because of the time constraints which structure the news.

Although most broadcasters and scholars understand the limitations of television news, the viewers do not. As one media analyst notes:

> In the case of watching candidates on television, viewers may flatter themselves that they can discern something about the character, intellect and personality --perhaps even the competence -- of the the nominees (Graber (Ed.) 1980).

Thus the viewer may perceive that he/she is politically well-informed about the presidential candidates because he/she is a regular watcher of a network news program. The viewer uses the media to gain a sense of security and social adequacy. If a regular viewer of the network news, he/she will hear the same type of story day after day thus reinforcing and gratifying what he/she already knows to believe (Graber:1984:24).

We can realize that twenty-two minutes is an inadequate amount of time to understand the complexities of presidential campaign issues. When we take into account that probably less than five minutes a newcast is devoted to the campaign, we can see that the television news media must rely on a structure which will facilitate easy understanding of complex occurrences. The network news media achieves this by the use of themes.

THEMES

Perhaps the most important difference between print media and television news is the use of themes. The structural elements of television require, as stated previously, visual images and brief news stories. To facilitate the understanding and interest of the story, television reporters break down the complex happening into easily defined ideas or terms that the viewer finds familiar. One scholar notes, "transcending any particular news story or coverage of a single day's events are generalized approaches or themes that characterize television news as opposed to newspaper news." (Graber (Ed.) 1984:91). Thus a theme is established which runs successively through all related stories and provides the viewer a familiar basis for understanding.

The use of themes results in a specific way of looking at the news. Happenings are not presented as random occurrences but instead are presented as fitting into some greater whole. Thomas Patterson states:

> Television's principle need is for a clear continuous narrative sustained throughout the story - something with a beginning, a middle, and an end ... television's primary concern is not the facts of an event, it is the theme. Indeed, on television the facts become the material with which the chosen theme is illustrated. Description gives way to interpretation (Patterson 1980:27).

Therefore, he believes, that the facts are supplementary devices used to substantiate the chosen theme. Or as Graber notes: "Reality becomes further distorted because the process

of shaping news events into interesting, cohesive stories often gives these events totally new meaning or significance" (Graber 1984:19). Thus, because of the use of themes news moves in a circle. Facts (news) occur, reporters establish a theme to explain the news to the public, resulting similar facts are then organized into this repeating theme. Hence, the use of themes in television news results in an emphasis on interpretation rather than description.

Patterson explains the result of themes as follows: "Television places greater emphasis on the why than on the what, attempting to explain rather than to describe. Television's emphasis on interpretation derives from its need for tightly structured stories" (1980:26). This interpretation leads to a "reality" that is media-defined. Paul Weaver summarizes:

> The other world is based on real people and events but the constant intervention of the television newsman -- with his unremitting efforts to select, highlight, summarize, explain and above all to tell a story -- drains it of its characteristic humdrum and endows it with the magic intensity of myth and fairy tale" (1976:5).

The campaign, through the use of themes, becomes an exciting, dramatic saga that the viewer can tune into on a daily basis.

A net result of the concentration on these simplistic themes is the over-reporting of trival events at the expense of more substantive subject matter, a phenomenon that is characteristic of television news because of its structural needs (Graber 1984:70). One could interpret the vast

coverage that Iowa and New Hampshire receive, because of their placement on the primary schedule, as an example of the concentration on trival events. The use of pleasing visual images, that may not be intrinsically important but have familiar characters, such as the President in the White House Rose Garden, is another example of the triviality of televised news due to themes.

Thus, a theme helps the viewer to understand the otherwise complex happenings because the complexity and uncertainty are taken away and replaced by a false simplicity and clarity of an easily understood theme. In presidential campaign coverage, the most predominate theme used by the media is called horse-race journalism, and will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

The study of television's effects upon the public in general, and upon voters in specific, began in the early 1970's and has grown throughout the years. A complete study of the theories of media effects, however, would require another thesis. There are several theories: uses and gratification theory, selective perception theory, minimal effects theory, and the agenda-setting theory, just to name a few. Scholars by no means have reached a unanimous decision in support of these theories and research continues to find a methodology that effectively judges media effects. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will briefly discuss the

most widely accepted of these theories, that is, the agenda-setting theory.

The agenda-setting theory was perhaps most concisely phrased by Cohen in 1963: "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling their audience what to think **about**" (Cohen 1963:13). It is a surprisingly simple theory; the complexities arise in developing a method for testing it. The theory states that the media sets the agenda of what is important and what is not. Things reported on the news are important; things not reported are either not important or do not exist in the minds of the audience. One study demonstrates the link between the theory of agenda-setting and presidential elections:

> We have shown that by ignoring some problems and attending to others television news programs profoundly affect which problems viewers take seriously. In a parallel way, candidates for political office not taken seriously by news organizations quickly discover that neither are they taken seriously by anybody else (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1984:58).

If we believe that agenda-setting is true, which we can because of the vast literature and evidence in support of it. Then we can see that candidates who fail to attract media coverage will not be able to succeed in a campaign where

[1] For an intensive study of the theory of agenda-setting including a discussion of experiments and methodology, please see Inengar, Shanto and Kinder, Donald, **News That Matters**, (University of Chicago Press;Chicago, 1987).

media coverage is so essential to success. Therefore, the media's power rests in its interpretation of who or what events merit coverage.

This power of the media has been termed the gatekeeping function. Gatekeepers are news editors or news directors who are responsible for choosing from the vast amount of information what deserves coverage. As McCombs and Shaw state:

> Each day editors and news directors -- the gatekeepers in news media systems -- must decide which items to pass and which to reject ... agenda-setting asserts that audiences learn these saliences from the news media, incorporating a similar set of weights into their personal agendas (1984:164).

Gatekeepers are bound by the structural needs of their medium, in television that means a relience on familiar images that fit into a theme. Decisions are made on which of the several candidates running for president has the best chance of winning and media coverage is awarded to those that demonstrate this. That media coverage, in turn, increases the candidate's viability because he/she is interpreted to be more important than candidates who receive less coverage, according to the agenda-setting theory. Thus, the agenda-setting theory demonstrates the importance of media coverage to the presidential aspirant.

CONCLUSION

Television, as a major source of information for most Americans, is now a essential part of presidental campaigns. The structure of television has a great deal to do with the

way presidential campaigns are covered. The professional model of newsmaking states that reported news is not a mirrored reflection of reality, but a collage of events that are selected for coverage according to the media's structure, function and needs.

Television and elections work well together. Elections fit the criteria for a good story -- they are dramatic, familiar, and tell an interesting story. Television provides the vital link between the candidates and the voters. Elections swell with appropriate and attractive visual images. Candidates use pseudo-events or photo opportunities to gain television coverage. As the importance of television increases, so does the need for candidates who are able to effectively use and manipulate the media. This is termed the telegenic candidate.

Television, because of time constraints has become the perfect forum for the presidential candidate because of the medium's concentration on national politics and personalities. The use of themes is an outgrowth of the constraints on time because themes help to break down complex ideas or events into easily understood terms.

Finally, we looked at the agenda-setting theory of television,which states that the media sets the American agenda of important events or situations. This theory applies to presidential campaigns because candidates deemed important by the media receive media attention, and thus, are deemed important by the audience.

To synthesize these insights, we find that the structure and effects of television directly relates to the type of coverage that campaigns receive. That is, the need for visual images and brief interesting stories leads to a reliance upon upon themes. The agenda-setting theory states that the theme, with its characters and setting, used by the media will be interpreted by the public as the important elements of the campaign. Let us now examine that theme -- horse-race journalism.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE GATES...

The Theme of Horse-race Journalism

"It doesn't matter how much or how long or how often a candidate talks about issues to small groups in Iowa, or answers issue oriented questions, or talks in terms and substance on why he ought to be nominated if the coverage is on the momentum and the horse-race."

David A. Keene
Campaign manager
Bush for President 1980

The network's coverage of Presidential campaigns utilizes a specific theme which permeates a significant portion of the time devoted to the campaign. This theme has been given a variety of names by political scientists including horse-race journalism, hoopla coverage, and game coverage. I will use the term horse-race journalism, as I feel it best defines this theme. C. Anthony Broh defines horse-race journalism, in his Public Opinion Quarterly article of the same name, as:

> For journalists, the horse-race metaphor provides a framework for analysis. A horse is judged not by its absolute speed or skill but in comparison to the speed of other horses, and especially by its wins and losses. Similarly, candidates are pushed to discuss other candidates; events are understood in a context of competition; and picking the winner becomes an important topic. The race - not the winner - is the story. The candidate's image, personality, staff relations, and strategy are the main foci of reporting (1980:515).

Network election coverage thus emphasizes competition of the campaign over all other campaign events. Furthermore, horse-race labels are used to describe the events and contestants in the race. There is a favorite, a front-runner, a long

shot, or a dark horse. The concentration of coverage, therefore, is on who is winning or losing, as defined by the use of polls or primary results, rather than which candidate would be a better president. The result of this theme is summarized by Thomas Patterson, one of the foremost experts of media and elections,

> The press's version of election politics elevates competition over substance, outcomes over process, and the immediate over the enduring. While these favored aspects are not an insignificant part of the election, focus on them represents an unquestionably limited perspective (1980:53).

How widespread is the use of horse-race journalism in the coverage of Presidential campaigns? One study of the 1980 campaign found that a regular viewer of the "CBS Evening News" was exposed to seven and a half hours of campaign coverage during the first six months of 1980; and out of that seven and a half hours, more than five hours was devoted to horse-race coverage (Bartels 1980:33). This phenomenon is not solely found in television coverage either. A study by Patterson, of the networks and major newspapers, found that "half or more of the election coverage in each of the news sources dealt with the competition between the candidates. Winning and losing, strategy and logistics, appearances and hoopla were the dominant themes of election news" (1980:24).

The next logical question is: why is there an over emphasis on the horse-race aspects of the campaign? This is best explained by an understanding of the operations of network news as found in the first chapter. The network's need for newsworthy, "hard" news leads to an

emphasis on the game. Bartels notes:

> Campaign events [polls, primary results etc.] provide a steady stream of convenient `news hooks' for stories about how a candidate is doing; by contrast, issue positions are seldom timely unless they have changed, been misstated, or led to a dramatic conflict between the candidates. (1988:42)

Campaign events, as Bartels calls them, such as primary results and polls, are used by the media because they are the most visible aspects of the campaign. They are easily interpreted and understood, and therefore, provide perfect measuring rods for a candidate's success. One scholar notes, "Rather than risk writing complex campaign stories that most would ignore, newspeople prefer to feature the horse-race glamour of campaign developments" (Graber 1984:202).

Furthermore, recall, as explained in the first chapter, that presidential campaigns are inherently newsworthy. Thus, the network assigns a reporter to travel with the most successful candidates and expects news from that reporter on a day-to-day basis. This gives the reporter great freedom which, as Patterson suggests, leads to a reliance on horse-race journalism:

> On those days when nothing new or important happens ... reporters have greater freedom in their choice of news material. Given their general view of election politics and of news they tend to use this freedom for updates on the player's strategies and standings rather than reruns of the candidates policy statements, records, background and qualifications (1980:30).

The emphasis on strategy and horse-race then is a direct result of structure of journalism. This is summarized by one political scientist: "The emphasis on the strategic and

horse-race characteristics of presidential elections at the expense of both the candidates' records and their policy pronouncements is rooted in the imperatives and constraints under which journalists labor" (Paletz 1981:49).

The reliance upon horse-race journalism is most pronounced in the pre-primary and primary stages of the campaign, and less pronounced in the general election. During the pre-primary and primary periods, reporters are attempting to narrow the field of legitimate candidates, and use poll results, or other hard news measuring rods, to determine which campaigns are viable. One study found that, "due primarily to predictions, reports and analysis of primary election outcomes the game received 15% more coverage at this time than during the general election" (Patterson 1980:29).

To best understand this predominant theme of Presidental campaign coverage, let us examine the three important elements of horse-race journalism: the reliance upon conflict, the importance of press expectations and casting, and the use of polls. Then let us examine some of the results of this concentration on the race by looking at voter reactions.

CREATION OF CONFLICT

The horse-race theme which dominates coverage of Presidential elections centers around the need for conflict between the candidates. Let us remember that television coverage of the campaign begins about three years before the

general election; that is quite a bit of time to keep interesting. Reporters want to find clear cut, easily understood, differences about the candidates. That is not always a simple thing to do. The need for conflict is described by Doris Graber:

> Producing exciting stories means concentrating on conflicts, real or manufactured, keeping score about who is ahead or behind in the race, and digging out tidbits about the personal and professional lives and foibles of the actors in the political drama (1984: 192).

Since clear cut differences between the candidates cannot always be found, the press attempts to cultivate controversy and differences. Especially in the the primary period, the field of candidates may be quite large with several candidates with nearly identical issue positions. This is a difficult concept for the public to grasp especially because party identification cannot be a determining factor. In order for the press to sustain viewer interest, differences between the candidates, or controversy, is highlighted and stimulated.

Am I implying that journalists will make controversy if there is none around? Yes. As one political scientist states, "Controversy is news. When it is absent from a presidential election, reporters will stimulate it. When inchoate, they will try to tease it out" (Palatz 1981:49). Doris Graber further asserts that because conflict is deemed attractive, memorable and necessary for a good story, journalists will goad a candidate into confrontations by asking questions that will stimulate an existing conflict or

that will lead the way to new battles (1980:187). Furthermore, even when a situation is not confrontational the media may use labels which present it to the public as a major conflict -- labels such as fight, feud, battle, clash etc. This heightens the drama of the event and makes it different and interesting.

Clear-cut Issues

The media attempts to draw a distinct division between the candidates. Therefore, there is a concentration on the issues that neatly separate the candidates. These issues are much preferred to issues on which the candidates agree or where the differences are imprecise. The result of this concentration is that "important issues of public policy may go unnoticed if the candidates agree on a position, and conversely, seemingly unimportant issues may receive undue attention because they fit the horse-race metaphor" (Broh 1980:515). This concentration is especially apparent in televised news. As one study shows:

> Of the issue coverage on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscasts, 67% was devoted to clearcut issues, compared for example to 48% of issue news in the Los Angeles Herald Examiner. The networks extraordinary emphasis on such issues owes mostly to televisions preference for issues that do not require lengthy exposition and appeal to a broad audience (Patterson 1980:34).

The predominant use of clear-cut issues over diffuse issues in television news is clearly shown in Table 2:1. The table shows the types of issue stories: clear-cut; mixed (those

Table 2:1 AMOUNT OF EMPHASIS ON CLEAR-CUT AND DIFFUSE ISSUES IN NEWS COVERAGE AND IN CANDIDATE-CONTROLLED COMMUNICATION

type of issue content	T.V. Ads	Convention Speeches	Network Evening News	L.A. Herald Examiner	Time/ Newsweek
clear-cut	26%	22%	67%	48%	46%
mixed	23	22	14	25	19
diffuse	51	56	19	30	35
Total	100	100	100	100	100

stories which combine elements from both of the other types); and diffuse, and the amount of emphasis of these types in news coverage and in candidate-controlled communication. The table shows clearly that television news relies upon clear-cut issues much more than candidate speeches or newspapers.

Furthermore, the reporting of these issues is spiced up with the reliance upon metaphors of confrontation. The candidate is reported to have "clashed" or "attacked" the other candidate's issue position. Thus, the press attempts to separate the candidates into black versus white, something easily understood and exciting.

Debates

A prime example of conflict-making is found in the television coverage of the presidential candidate debates. These debates are hyped by the media to be a major

1 The data for table 2:1 and all other related statistics can be found in Patterson, Thomas, **The Mass Media Election**, (Praeger; New York., 1980) pgs. 33-38.

battleground where the diametrically opposed candidates have an opportunity to fight out their different opinions to the figurative death. There are pre-debate stories on how the candidates are preparing: their strategies and plans. Then there is the all important post-debate commentary where reporters, anchormen, and political analysts can answer that pivotal question: who won?. A study of television coverage of the 1980 debates between Carter and Reagan by Thomas Patterson found the following:

> As the debate approached, however, reporters began to build the debates as pivotal to the elections outcome and the news focus turned to questions of how the candidates would perform, who would win, and how the campaign might be affected....by the time the debate had taken place, the race theme clearly dominated news coverage and it was largely in this context that the presidential debates were reported (1980:39).

Coverage of debates centers largely around being able to determine a clear-cut winner. It does not make a good story to say that both men did fairly well, that their opinions on most issues are similar, that there were no fireworks and that they just had a friendly chat with each other. No, it is much more interesting to have one candidate fail miserably while the other candidate soars to victory.

One of the ways candidates have failed in past debates is to make a "gaffe." A gaffe is defined by political scientists, Nimmo and Combs, as a mistake "inconsistent with the rhetorical vision of the candidate making it" (1984:153). The classic example of a gaffe was found in the 1976 debates between President Ford and Governor Jimmy Carter. Ford's gaffe came when he said Eastern Europe was not under Soviet

domination. Journalists, you can bet, sit around their monitors hoping and praying that the candidates will make a gaffe. When they do, the journalists seize upon it. Looking at the Ford example, most scholars, politicians, and even reporters would admit that Ford did not mean to say that, and did not believe it. But that is beside the point. He said it and thus it was out of his hands. When a candidate loses control of an issue it is termed by Michael Robinson as a "medialites." This term is defined by, "events, developments, or situations to which the media have given importance by emphasizing, expanding or featuring them in such a way that their real significance has been modified distorted or obscured" (Graber 1984:204). The Ford gaffe was made out by the media to be a major mistake, forever labeling Ford as a bumbling idiot not quite in touch with reality. He lost control of the situation and the gaffe was focused on and expanded upon. Thus, the focus upon a gaffe is one way for the media to establish a clear winner and loser and to heighten drama and excitement.

Debates, however, are just one event in the three year saga of the campaign. The media uses other events such as the primaries and caucuses to determine which candidates are viable. Especially in the early stages, when the field of candidates is wide, the media needs ways to focus on a few, serious candidates. The media sets up little contests that will separate and distinguish a "winning" candidate from a "losing" candidate. One such contest is the ability to

receive federal funding. The media tends to concentrate upon candidates who have satisfied the requirements for matched federal funding early in the campaign. In actuality, it does not matter to the candidate if he gets the federal funding in the first month or the last month. In fact, it could be more prudent to concentrate the candidate's energy in a few states rather than in the twenty needed for federal funding. However, once that first test is set up the candidate must play along in order to get the coveted television coverage.

Likewise, early primary and caucus results are given greatly exaggerated importance. This stems from the fact that they are one of the first "hard news" sources of the campaign, though which the media attempts to distinguish clear winners and losers. This phenomenon will be discussed in depth later, however, it is important to point out how it directly relates to the horse-race theme. The author of the book **The Iowa Precinct Caucuses - The Making of a Media Event** summarizes this idea:

> The reporting of Iowa caucus results is a part of the game focus of presidential campaigns, essentially meaningless caucus outcomes are reported to satisfy the media's need for results or hard news. Furthermore, the media not only reports the outcomes for the American public, but in terms of the expectations that the media themselves often had helped to create (Winebrenner 1987:10).

Thus, the horse-race theme permeates the coverage of campaigns as the press attempts to find or stimulate conflict and drama. There is a reliance upon clear-cut versus diffuse issues, metaphors of confrontation are used in

reporting, and events such as debates or primaries are given exaggerated importance because they are the forum by which winners and losers are selected. This emphasis on confrontation attempts to present the candidates as black versus white, a largely media-contrived image.

PRESET MEDIA EXPECTATIONS

The second consequence of the reliance upon the horse-race theme in the reporting of presidential campaigns is that the candidates are categorized by preset media expectations. In an effort to conserve the already limited television time available to the race, newscasters "create stereotypes of the various candidates early in the campaign and then build their stories around these stereotypes by merely adding new details to the established image" (Graber 1984:197). In other words, a theme is created for the candidate, a theme which enables the viewer to easily distinguish "this" candidate from "that" candidate. This phenomenon has several names associated with it including <u>casting</u>, <u>roles</u>, and <u>press expectations</u>.

The casting of candidates usually occurs early in the primary period as a way for the press to narrow the wide field of candidates. As one media scholar notes,

> Casting occurs .... when newspeople, on the basis of as yet slender evidence, must predict winners and losers in order to narrow the field of eligibles. Concentrating on the front-runner makes newspeople's tasks more manageable but often forces out of the race those who have been labeled losers (Paltez 1981:49).

If we recall that television news attempts to present the

news by using themes that tell a comprehensible story with familiar characters, and a beginning, middle, and end, then we can understand the need to distinguish one or two candidates from the pack. As Bartels notes, "It is virtually impossible to tell a coherent continuing story about a political struggle involving half a dozen major characters" (1988:120). The selection of a few candidates as viable in the pre-primary and primary periods is called "winnowing." Winnowing simply refers to the media's habit of concentrating coverage on the candidates which achieve the media benchmarks for success, such as winning New Hampshire, or achieving federal funding, while ignoring candidates who do not. David Broder, the dean of National Political Reporters summarizes this attitude of the press:

> Since we cannot reduce the number of states voting on Super Tuesday, we have to reduce the number of candidates treated as serious contenders. Those news judgments will be arbitrary - but not subject to appeal. Those who finish first or second in Iowa and New Hampshire will get tickets from the mass media to play in the next big round. Those who don't, won't (1980:103).

Hence, the first use of casting occurs early in the campaign as only a few candidates are given concentrated coverage.

The second use of casting occurs when the press imposes its expectations on the candidates. Much like a handicapper in a horse-race, the media devotes much energy in evaluating the comparative odds for success of the candidates, and then attaches labels which reflect these expectations. The most coveted label is that of the "front-runner" or

"winner." The "front-runner" monopolizes coverage and gains, as George Bush would say "the big mo," which means even more press coverage as the bandwagon affect occurs. This winning candidate has a specific personality projected upon him, as Dennis Weaver illustrates:

> As television news defines him the front runner isn't simply the candidate with the most votes; he is a person who, by virtue of his success, has the character of a winner...In short, the alchemy of news melodramatic imperatives transforms a winner into a winner-type and victory into evidence of absolute invincibility (1976:6).

Likewise, the candidates who are not the "front-runners" are labeled as losers. Weaver continues,

> Candidates who don't get as many votes as the front-runners are "also rans" and quickly find themselves "in trouble - deep trouble," in the oft used phrase of NBC's Tom Brokaw. A string of losses transforms a politician into "that beast...the chronic loser" -- a hapless sort of fellow for whom nothing goes right and whose situation is hopeless (1976:8).

The "front-runner" becomes the candidate to beat, while the losing candidate is either portrayed as a failure or, worse, does not receive coverage at all. Once typecast as a loser it is difficult for the candidate to escape that image. The press treats the loser with predictablity that further spirals the campaign downward. Bartels terms this predictablity the "deathwatch" and describes it as follows: "the deathwatch generally begins with a reference to the candidate's low standing in the polls, moves on to mention financial or scheduling problems, and ends with coverage of the final press conference, in which the candidate withdraws" (1988:40).

Then clearly, the object of the game must be to become labeled as the front-runner; however, the game is trickier than it may appear. Being labelled the front-runner definitely has its advantages, but it also has several disadvantages. As front-runner you are expected to win, and win big. You must live up to the press expectations, so even if you win but only by a little, that might be interpreted as a loss since you should have won by more. Perhaps, then the real key to the game is to be labeled a winner because you have exceeded the media's expectations for your campaign. This is exactly what Carter's campaign in 1976 accomplished. The Carter campaign of 1976 demonstrates brilliant strategic planning in capturing the front-runner label and using it to the best advantage. Put simply, Carter beat all preset media expectations for his campaign and then became labeled as the winner. Described by Christopher Arterton, Carter's strategy "...was to avoid the temptation to predict specific primary victories as an inducement for attracting support, so that their achievements would come as a surprise to political observers, principally journalists" (Barber 1978:38). Thus, Carter earned the title of "winner" because he managed to outrun and far exceed the expectations newspeople had established for his campaign's success.

It appears that a paradox has emerged. If the media wants to present an easily understood story of characters with specific personalities (ie. "winner" or "loser"), and the candidates wants to outsmart the press by appearing to be

losers and then winning -- how do these seemingly opposite goals interact? Does the media just change its casting of the candidates overnight? Yes. As described by Weaver the following occurs:

> One result of television journalism's insistence on trying to make up the people's mind for them is that when the people don't go along, television journalism has to rearrange the characters and the scenery. There were many such reversals of reality in the networks account of the [1976] primary season -- one day George Wallace would be described as a potent electoral threat, the next he would be described as a burntout case (1976:10).

Thomas Patterson also describes this occurrence: "When their predictions went awry, journalists responded with surprise speaking in their post-primary analyses about "shocking wins", "stunning turnabouts" and "eleventh hour reprieves" (1980:49). This is really not as paradoxical as it first appears. For example, what could be more exciting that stunning defeats and dramatic comebacks? One day, a politican is "on top of the world" only to find his campaign "shattered" by the surprize victory of his opponent the next. Thus, the casting of the candidates becomes another vehicle by which the networks can dramatize the presidential campaign and thus increase viewer interest.

The results and influence of such typecasting on the electorate are vast because the television's version of the campaign is the only source of information for most Americans and, thus, this is their reality. The "reality" of the campaign is largely a media-conceived creation due to the roles that the candidates are assigned. Weaver summarizes,

"By giving candidates roles and personae, television grossly overstates the degree and finality of the candidates success or failure" (1976:8). Thus, the reality of the race that is perceived by the television audience may be far removed from the actual events of the campaign.

RELIANCE ON POLLS

> "And they're off. Coming out of the gate, the first `Polls Shows [sic] Blacks Decisive for Carter.' Midway through August, `Poll Shows Slide in Carter Margin.' Into September, `Polls Show Ford Trailing in Bid for Two Voter Groups GOP Needs.' At the halfway mark in the campaign, `Voter Poll Finds Debate Aided Ford and Cut Carter's Lead.' As the candidate's approach the final month of campaigning, `First Time Ford is Ahead of Carter,' and even more exciting, `Polls Calls Race Tied." And in the stretch, "Survey Shows Carter Holds Lead.' At the wire it's Jimmy Carter elected president."
>
> C. Anthony Broh

The reporting and use of polls is one major element of the horse-race theme of presidential campaign coverage. As C. Anthony Broh illustrates in the above excerpt, polls are used throughout the campaign to demonstrate who is ahead and who is behind in the race. Two features of polls are that they are considered hard news by journalists, and they highlight differences in standing between the candidates. Thus, polls exhibit hard news "facts" of the race while highlighting the competition aspects of the campaign.

In the 1980 campaign, public opinion polls accounted for about fifteen percent (14.7) of all campaign events covered by the media. In a content analysis study by Stovall and Soloman of media coverage of the 1980 campaign, public

opinion polls were divided into two catagories: horse-race polls and other polls. Each of these catagories was then divided into subcategories. Two kinds of horse-race polls were identified: those dealing with general public opinion about the candidates and those emphasizing the count of electoral votes. Other categories of poll stories included perceptions of candidates; regional and state polls; polls of, about, or for special interest groups; polls about debate winners and losers; polls on various issues in the campaign; and polls on electorate behavior patterns. Table 2:2 displays the results of this study.[2] The polls labeled by

TABLE 2:2 POLLS AS NEWS EVENTS IN THE 1980 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

	Number of Poll Events	% of Total Poll Events	% of Total Campaign Events
Horse-race polls			
Public opinion	31	27.9	4.1
Vote emphasis	16	14.4	2.1
Other polls			
Candidates	9	8.1	1.2
Interest Groups	16	15.3	2.2
Debates	11	9.9	1.5
Issues	5	4.5	.7
Electoral behavior	1	.9	.1
Regional	2	1.8	.3
State	19	17.1	2.5
TOTALS	110	100.0	14.7

2 The information and statistics used for table 2:2 are taken from the article by Stovall, James Glen and Jacqueline H Soloman, "The Poll as a News Event in the 1980 Presidential Campaign," **Public Opinion Quarterly** (Vol. 48, 1984) pgs. 615-623.

Stovall/Soloman as "horse-race" are the polls most inherently competitive in nature; however, all the polls emphasize the differences between the candidates, and thus, are stressing the competition between the candidates.

This study also found that horse-race polls are used even more towards the end of the campaign. During the last two weeks of the campaign there was a marked increase in the use of polls:

> Whereas polls made up 14.7% of all events during the entire coded period, in the last two weeks of the campaign poll stories were 18.1% of the total. Horserace [sic] polls which constituted 6.2% of all events for the entire period, made up 11.9% of all events during the last two weeks (Stovall/Soloman 1984:620).

Thus, as the data from the 1980 campaign illustrates public opinion polls account for a substantial amount of campaign coverage. Let us examine the source of polls, how polls are reported, and finally the effect of polls on the electorate.

Source of Polls

One of the first questions which must be considered is: where do the polls come from? Some public opinion polls, such as the Gallup polls, are non-media owned polling organizations which have supplied the media with poll information for years. Increasingly however, media-sponsored polls have been used in the coverage of presidential campaigns. There is a controversy on whether or not such polls are valuable tools in campaign coverage. This discussion is summarized:

> ... news organizations themselves are commissioning public opinion polls in order to have exclusive rights

> in reporting their results. Defenders of this practice say that such polls give the news organizations added insight into the results and more assurance that the polls are conducted legitmately. Critics point out that news organizations are laying themselves open to the charge of creating news, overplaying their own poll results while underplaying others, and unduly intruding on the political process. (Stovall/Soloman 1984:616)

Some political scientists feel very strongly that media-owned and operated public opinion polls: such as the CBS-New York Times poll; the NBC-Associated Press poll; and the ABC-Washington Post poll; serve the goals of the media more than informing the electorate. Doris Graber called media-generated polls "yet another weapon in the arsenal for kingmaking." (Graber 1984:183). While Cockburn and Ridgeway, as cited in the article by Stovall and Soloman, assert darker motives on the part of news organizations and call media-sponsored polls "pure media events designed to sustain interest in the 12-month body watch known as a presidential election" (Stovall/Soloman 1984:616). One thing that is not controversial, is that media-sponsored polls are the most reported of the many types of public opinion polls. In the 1980 campaign 73% of the polls reported on television were media-generated (Graber 1984:183).

Use of Polls

Thus, as the data from the 1980 campaign illustrates, the use of polls constitutes a substantial part of election news. Because of the nature of the polls, or any other statistical analysis, there are a variety of ways in which polls can be interpreted or manipulated. Broh explains:

> ... journalists have considerable flexibility in their interpretation of poll data. They can predict the election outcome or simply report the findings. They can report the percentage of support for each candidate or the difference between the candidates. They can report the data for the entire electorate or for subcatagories of it. They can select a point of comparision with which to interpret the polls. They can report voter reaction to spectacles during the campaign rather than report the current popularity of each candidate. They can report poll results accurately or erroneously. They can question the validity of a particular poll. Finally, they can ignore polls (Broh 1980:516).

Journalists utilize polls in each of these ways, hence giving themselves substantial power in interpreting and relaying the poll information. The audience, however, perceives the poll results as hard news or facts and are probably unaware of the reporter's power of interpretation. This is not to say that the reporter is biased or manipulates the polls in favor of one candidate or another intentially. However, what the newsperson highlights or excludes when reporting the poll results will have an effect, either positive or negative, on the candidates. Consequently, we must understand the variables behind the poll results.

Trial heat polls are one way in which competition between the candidates is stressed thus making the campaign more interesting to follow. A trial heat refers to the question that asks people how they would vote if the campaign were held on the day of the interview. This technique "heightens interest on the horse-race itself, not its winner" (Broh 1980:518) because the results are exceptionally volatile depending on the events of the campaign. For instance, a few days after a gaffe, such as Ford's Soviet

domination comment which recieved so much press coverage, and a trial heat poll would probably show a dramatic drop in support for the candidate.

The comparison of poll data is often used by newspeople to show candidate strength or weakness and thus highlight the changes in the horse-race. Current poll information can be compared to earlier polls, or data from one public opinion poll source can be compared to data from another source. The comparison of polls in this way gives substantial interpretational power to the news organization. The result of comparing polls from different times is described as:

> Another journalist technique for enhancing interest through polls is comparing current and earlier poll data. Journalists can choose conparisons in order to describe the candidates as close or far apart, but usually their reports imply constantly changing opinion, so that a candidate can seem to win the race with a sudden burst of popularity (Broh 1980:521).

By comparing poll data, the journalist is deciding what is important and choosing the data to support that. As stated previously, competition is one element of the race deemed important so the poll data is chosen in such a way as to highlight that competition. Likewise the comparison of different poll agencies, also results in the stress on competition:

> A problem with comparing polls of one agency with the polls of another agency is the variation in undecided voters, which changes for several reasons...most important in our discussion, the bias in one sample may differ from the bias in another. Journalists will report the resulting differences in candidate support as attitude change, and thus make a campaign appear much more volatile than it really is (Broh 1980:522-23).

Hence, public opinion polls are compared in such a way as to increase the competitive nature of the campaign thus making the campaign appear more dramatic and interesting.

With public opinion poll data, as with any type of statistical analysis, there is always a risk that the results will be reported erroneously. Mistakes can be made in which the wrong numbers are used, or the data can just be misinterpreted. As Stovall and Soloman explain:

> ...the public opinion poll is not a neutral factor in the campaign. Polsby and Wildavsky (1980) repeatedly assert that reporting the outcome of polls affects the behavior of the candidates and party leaders by giving them information about the state of an election. They and many others have pointed out the ease with which poll results may be distorted or misinterpreted by journalists, especially those who are unfamiliar with scientific polling techniques (1984:615).

Erroneously reported poll data is a relatively rare occurance in the media's coverage of the campaign. However, Broh found in his study of the 1976 campaign that the following occured when errors were made:

> In a few instances, minor inaccuracies occurred in the reporting of polls, and always in a manner that indicated a close race...With no attempt to deceive or mislead voters, the cumulative effect of the individually trivial inaccuracies is nonetheless to heighten the sense of competition and to sharpen the image of a horse race. They are perhaps most important as a demonstration of the unconscious power of the drive to maintain voter -- and reader or viewer --interest (1980:525).

Thus, even when results are interpreted incorrectly they still serve to heighten competition and add drama to the presidential campaign.

The discrepancies in the use of the Roper polls in the

1976 campaign lead to the following satirical letter to the editor of the New York Times by Burns Roper:

> To the Editor:
> ...It had not occurred to me to combine from our "instant" debate polls the 31% who thought Governor Carter won with the 30% felt it was a draw and conclude "...a total of 61% of those polled thought that the debate was a draw or a Carter victory." Nor was I perspicacious enough to recognize that "in political terms" that was an excellent result for the nominee of the stronger party. [However, I became more confused when I read] that since the President's strength prior to the debate was only about 33% (more or less, depending on which poll you read), the debate was a victory for the President since his win-plus-draw figure was 61% according to the Associated Press poll --roughly twice the percentage preferring him prior to the debate...I had looked simplistically at our 39% Ford, 31% Carter, 30% draw figures and concluded that President Ford has a small edge. It is now obvious to me that it was either a clear victory for Governor Carter or an overwhelming win for President Ford (Broh 1980:522-23).

Thus, the search for excitement carries with it the dangers of distortion.

There are several effects of the use of public opinion polls. Polls do serve to provide a framework by which the campaign can be understood. They do provide meaningful guideposts by which the support of the candidates can be measured. However as Broh summarizes some of the affects are damaging: "Reporters who seek a theme to make a story exciting may inadvertently distort polls to the point of nonsense ... finally, the horse-race image can encourage voters to focus on exciting, but ultimately irrelevant aspects of the campaign" (Broh 1980:528). Thus, polls highlight competitive aspects of the race, who's ahead who's behind, over the more substantial issues of the campaign.

Polls do have an effect on the voter, as the voter interprets the data as scientific evidence of support behind a candidate. If a candidate is shown to a be a clear winner or a clear loser, he may gain or lose support according to the role he has been assigned. As Doris Graber illustrates: "Media predictions and public opinion polls also move in tandem. For instance all 1980 presidential candidates designated as losers by the media lost support in the polls, while all who were designated by the media as winners gained support" (Graber 1984:182). Political science team of Nimmo and Combs further explain this bandwagon effect that is a result of poll data, "Within minutes after the debate, pollsters man their phones in efforts to conduct surveys of who people think won or lost. It may be that most people do not know, but once told that a nationwide poll said that candidate A won, people buy that fantasy" (1984:153). Hence, public opinion polls do not only monitor the opinion of the electorate, but also effect those opinions. Polls are another tool of the horse-race theme, used by journalists, to heighten interest and to create an exciting presidential campaign.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to show the elements of campaign coverage that are used by the media and termed by political scientists as horse-race journalism. Horse-race journalism is the predomiant theme of television coverage of

elections, and results in a slant towards competition and differences between the candidates. The use of drama and conflict, candidate casting, and polls provides an easily understood framework that enables the networks to sustain voter interest throughout the campaign season.

The use of drama and conflict stems from the networks' need for exciting stories. The media will highlight clear-cut issue differences between the candidates, use labels, and emphasize rhetorical mistakes or gaffes. The debates between the candidates is the classic example of media-sponsored drama. The debate offers the media a stand-off between the candidates, and the competition is emphasized by the use of dramatic narratives. Keeping with the horse-race theme, the need for conflict highlights the importance of: who won? over the other issues of the campaign.

The casting of the candidates into stereotypical roles enables the media to draw distinct divisions which clearly separate "that" candidate from "this" candidate. The casting can refer to the personality of the candidate; for instance, Bush cast as a "wimp" and Dukakis as a "bore" in the 1988 campaign. Or casting can refer to the candidates relative postition to the other candidates, ie. "front-runner." The candidates attempt to win the game by outsmarting the media, that is, by exceeding the press expectations. This leads the media to constantly change and re-cast the candidates, which makes the campaign appear much more exciting and interesting.

Public opinion polls are also used as a device to

measure the relative strength or weakness of the candidates during the race. Polls are perceived by both the media and the electorate as scientific "hard" news reflecting the standings of the candidates. In fact, journalists possess substantial powers of interpretation in their presentation of the public opinion poll data. They can compare or selectively interpret the polls in many ways, almost always in ways that make the campaign appear more volatile than it really is. Media-sponsored polls are used increasingly by the networks. These polls have added to the controversy of whether or not such polls create or relay the news. Finally, polls tend to focus viewer interest on the exciting but irrelevant aspects of the race.

The effect of this theme on the viewer/voter who relies on television coverage of the campaign as a substantial source of campaign information, is that the reality of the campaign shown on television is a largely media-conceived image. Rarely do the candidates have an opportunity to share important issue information, because the stress of the campaign is not on who would make a better president but who is ahead on the racetrack to be the president. Who would be a better president is answered by the media as who is closest to being the president. The race appears exciting, the candidates appear different and distinguishable, there is drama, and victory and defeat -- it is a story. However, the story of the presidential campaign that is created by horse-race journalism elevates the competition over all other

substantial issues of the campaign, which is a very limited perspective.

CHAPTER 3

AND THEY'RE OFF

The Role of the Early Delegate Selection Contests in the Campaign

> Were it not for the media, the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary results would be about as relevant to the presidential nomination as opening day baseball scores are to a pennant race. The media make the outcomes relevant, even crucial, to presidential candidacies.
>
> David L. Paletz
> **Media, Power, Politics**

Coverage of the presidential campaign by the media cannot be understood without a detailed examination of the the early delegate selection contests: Iowa and New Hampshire. Since 1968, these contests, the Iowa precinct caucus and the New Hampshire primary, have become increasingly important, even vital, to the campaign. 1968 marks a fundamental change in the way presidential nominees are selected and resulted in the magnified importance of these two selection processes. The reforms of 1968 changed the selection of presidential nominees in a fundamental way. Until 1968, the nominees were chosen by a complex deliberative process which gave substantial power to state party leaders and other political elites. The `smoke-filled back rooms' of the convention halls were the forums in which the presidential nominees were chosen. Since the 1968 reforms, which attempted to give the nominee selection process over to the voters, primaries have become the key to the nomination. As one writer notes, "Since 1968,

presidential campaigns have shifted from the circus of conventions to the travelling road show of presidential primaries and media events" (Brady 1987:127).

The 1968 reforms shifted the power of selection from the party elites to the voters in state primaries. The media became the information link to the voters, relaying important cues, and thus informing the voters about the candidates. The role of the media is substantial, as it is the only source of political information for the vast majority of Americans. The role of the media is described as follows:

> The media have become not only reporters of the news but also important actors in the electoral process. They identify the candidates for the American public: by emphasis or neglect they decide which issues are important; they are instrumental in establishing a set of expectations about the candidates likelihood of success; they evaluate the progress of the race according to the expectations they help to create; and finally, they determine the "winners" and "losers" again according to their own expectations (Winebrenner 1987:166).

ROLE OF MEDIA INTERPRETATION

The number and importance of the primaries has grown since the party reforms of 1968, and so has the public reliance upon the media as the central information link. The period around the first primaries is where the media has the most effect because the field of candidates is wide and party identification cannot be used as a differentiating device. Thus the candidates which are highlighted by the media appear to the public as the most viable. Candidates must now succeed in primaries in order to secure the nomination and

the media is the predominant informer for the public. As Thomas Patterson states, "It is now almost imperative for the serious candidate to seek nomination through the primaries and the media are the only means of frequent contact with voters in the key states and in the nation" (1980:4).

As stated in the previous chapters, the news media relies upon the primaries as "hard news" about the relative strength or weakness of the candidates. The results of the primaries is relayed to the viewers as the definitive answer to the question of who is a viable candidate. Studies of the media and elections have shown repeatedly, however, that the reporting of primary outcomes as "hard news results" is largely journalistic interpretation of the events. In other words, if a candidate wins New Hampshire and that demonstrates his/her viability this is because the media says so. Conceivably, New Hampshire could be ignored and some other contest highlighted. As one political scientist states:

> The dominance of perception over concrete political support is particularly marked during the pre-primary and early primary periods. The latitude of journalistic interpretation is also greatest at this time, when the indicators of growing or declining political support are at their poorest in predictive validity (Barber 1978:4).

The early delegate selection events, Iowa and New Hampshire, are given increased coverage because they are the first caucus and primary in the nomination season. Other than being the first contests, these events have no other intrinsic value. They are perceived by the media as the

first measuring rods of the campaign and the significance of their outcome is overstated. They are highlighted not because of the delegate count, a viable determinant of actual support, but because of the date of the contests. The delegate count is minimal, but as the first contests the media perceives the results as much more important than the actual delegate count would warrant. This is summerized:

> The fact is that the reality in the early going of a presidential campaign is not the delegate count at all. The reality of the beginning stage is the psychological impact of the results -- the perception by the press, public and contending politicans of what has happened (Patterson 1980:47).

The perception by the media that New Hampshire and Iowa are important is what makes New Hampshire and Iowa important. The media believe New Hampshire and Iowa to be important, so the candidates believe them to be important, then the viewers percieve them to be important and -- voila! they are important. It is a self-fulfilling circle. In closing, this point is so central it bears repeating: it is the perception of these contests as important that makes them important. Barber states:

> Those who manage presidential campaigns uniformly believe that interpretations placed upon campaign events are frequently more important than the event themselves particularly in the early nomination stages, perceptions outweigh reality in terms of their political impact (Barber 1978:10).

"Winnowing" and Primaries

The media use the results of Iowa and New Hampshire as means by which to determine viable candidates from loser

candidates. Candidates who succeed in these two contests are deemed `winners' and receive substantially more press coverage than those who do not do well in these contests. The attitude of the press is summarized as follows:

> Separate studies of candidate coverage in the 1980 and 1984 campaigns suggest that the media, in effect, divide presidential candidates into three groups: the hopeless, the plausible, and the likely, with substantial differences between the three in amount and quality of coverage. Once the nomination process begins, which category a candidate gets placed in depends very largely on his showings in two early delegate selection events: New Hampshire primary and Iowa caucus (Mayer 1987:16).

This process of narrowing the field of eligible candidates from a large multicandidate field to two, or at the most three candidates; is termed the "winnowing function" of the press. Studies have shown that this function of the press has been performed in the 1980, 1984, and 1988 campaigns, almost entirely, by the Iowa caucus. The New Hampshire primary, by contrast, is now interpretated as the first major test of strength between these two candidates, who will, in all probability fight it out through the rest of the primary season (Mayer 1987:22).

Thus the results of the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary are reported in a way that reflects the media's interpretation of the events. As one political scientist explains the primaries do not have to be interpreted the way the press does so:

> In theory there is nothing total about a narrow victory or even a landslide in a state's presidential primary. First, a single primary is just one indicator of the candidates popularity in a system of fifty state contests ... Second, a

> presidential primary lacks the finality of the general election (Patterson 1980:43).

However, the media tends to report the results of a primary with finality -- there are definate winners and losers. But the results are often much less definitive than one might be lead to believe. For instance, in 1976 Jimmy Carter "won" the Iowa caucus and emerged as the frontrunner. He was rewarded with intensified media coverage: 726 lines of coverage in Time and Newsweek while Udall, Harris, Bayh, Jackson and Shriver averaged 30 lines each (Paletz 1981:35). He also received five times more television time than any of his rivals. But the catch is that Carter's "win" actually was that he recieved 28% of the vote, and came in second to "uncommited" which took 37% of the vote. Furthermore, the Democratic party rewards delegates on a proportional system so Carter did not win all of Iowa's forty-seven delegates, but only won thirteen delegate equivalents. Yet, the press coverage he received portrayed a stunning victory due to the interpretation of the media of these campaign events.

Thus, the media tends to report the results of primary or caucus events much like a general election; that is, there is always an absolute winner and loser. Furthermore, the viablity of a candidate is determined by the press in two contests in particular, Iowa and New Hampshire. The media use these events to eliminate from the field of candidates those which they define as "hopeless." The hopelessness of a candidate is proven by his/her loss in these two contests. Hence, as one writer notes:

> It is on the basis of such limited evidence that the media judge some candidates winners and others losers and begin the winnowing process. Thus, contrived media events like the Iowa caucuses with their straw polls and delegate equivalents, take on a life of their own and become a significant event in the electoral process (Winebrenner 1987:166).

STATISTICS OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

Most people realize that Iowa and New Hampshire, as the first contests, receive more coverage than the other forty-eight delegate selection events. But it is difficult to comprehend the magnitude of the exaggeration of the New Hampshire and Iowa contests. Let us examine some statistics which will hopefully illuminate this reality.

William C. Adams, using data from the 1984 campaign, offers the following comparisions:

* By itself, the New Hampshire primary recieved more attention than was given all the contests for delegates in the 17 southern and border states (including Texas and Florida) and the 7 Rocky Mountain states combined.
* New Hampshire's primary received 125 times as much coverage per Democratic primary voter as the large Ohio primary.
* The 8,403,000 Democratic primary voters in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, North Carolina, and California, combined, did not receive as much media attention as the 101,000 people who turned out for the Democratic primary in New Hampshire (Adams 1987:42).

Content analysis studies of television coverage by the networks offers dramatic proof of the over-emphasis of these contests. In 1980, the Iowa precinct caucus received 2940 news seconds, while New Hampshire received 2815 news seconds.

What does that mean? Each contest received at least 40% more coverage than any other state (Mayer 1987:22). In 1984, just the New Hampshire Democratic primary recieved 2830 news seconds (47 minutes) in coverage by NBC news. That translates into 10.2% of all its coverage given to the Democratic nomination campaign. ABC devoted 4240 news seconds (70 minutes) to New Hampshire which equal 16.4% of its coverage of the Democratic primaries and caucuses. And CBS invested 5260 (90 minutes) or 19.1% of its coverage of all the Democratic primary period, just to the New Hampshire Democratic primary (Buell 1987:61).

Table 3.1 illustrates this phenomenon in still another way. The table is calculated from ABC, CBS, NBC, and the New York Times coverage of the 1984 campaign. It is clearly demonstrated that New Hampshire, with by far the smallest population, achieves nearly one-fifth of all the coverage. And four states -- New Hampshire, Iowa, New York and California -- accounted for half of the media coverage of the 1984 campaign (Table 3.1 taken from Adams 1987:45).

Table 3.1 MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION CAMPAIGN -- JANUARY 1 TO JUNE 10 1984

State	% of total coverage	% of U.S population
New Hampshire	19.2%	.4%
Iowa	12.8	2.5
New York	11.1	7.5
California	6.9	10.8
Pennsylvania	5.5	5.0
New Jersey	5.0	3.2
Illinois	4.1	4.9
All other states	35.4	65.7

Finally, figure 3.1 is a pictorial representation of the United States with the states drawn in proportion to their share of news coverage in presidential campaigns. This is based upon the same information as presented in table 3.1. Clearly, New Hampshire and Iowa tower over the nation in campaign coverage. In contrast, figure 3.2 is a map of the United States with the states drawn in proportion to their electoral votes, which are approximate to their populations. It is clear to see here that New Hampshire and Iowa have very little importance in actual delegate count (i.e. in the general election results) but have enormous importance to the nominations campaign (Adams 1987:42-45).

THE IOWA PRECINCT CAUCUS

To best understand the transformation of Iowa into a major determinate of viability for a presidential candidate, let us examine the changing role of Iowa during the primary season from 1968 through 1984. The Iowa precinct caucus is an amazingly obscure and confusing way to select a presidential nominee.[1] It differs from a primary in that the results are not binding and no votes are taken anywhere in the process. The voters in Iowa go to party meetings and select "delegate equivalents" to send to the convention with

[1] For a more complete discussion of the intricacies of the Iowa Precinct Caucus please see the source I am indebted to for the following information pertaining to the Iowa Caucus event, Winebrenner, Hugh. **The Iowa Precinct Caucuses: The Making of a Media Event** (Iowa State University Press: Ames; 1980).

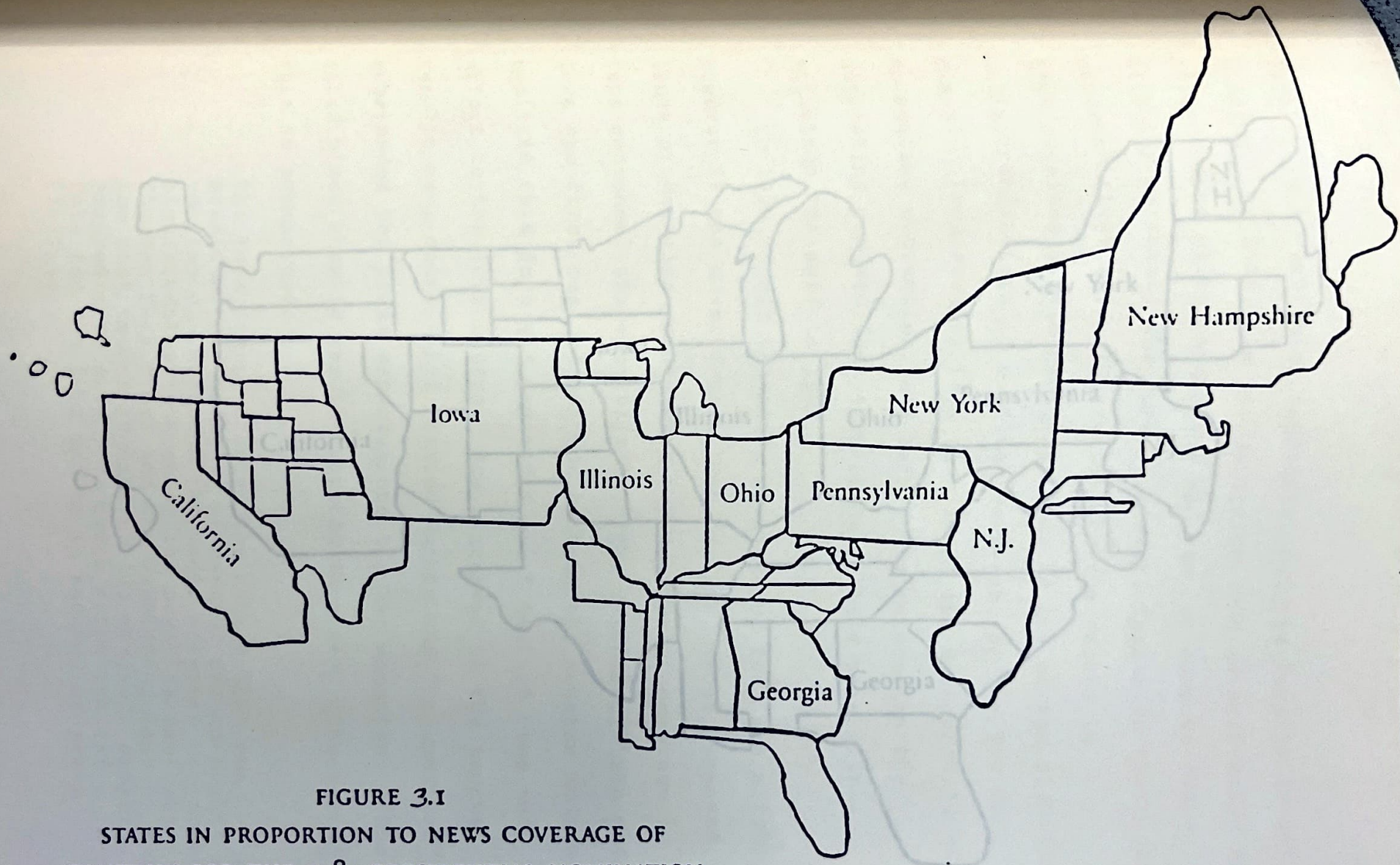

FIGURE 3.1

STATES IN PROPORTION TO NEWS COVERAGE OF CONTESTS FOR THE 1984 PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

Taken from William C. Adams, "As New Hamphire Goes...," Media and Momentum, Ed. Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), 42-45.

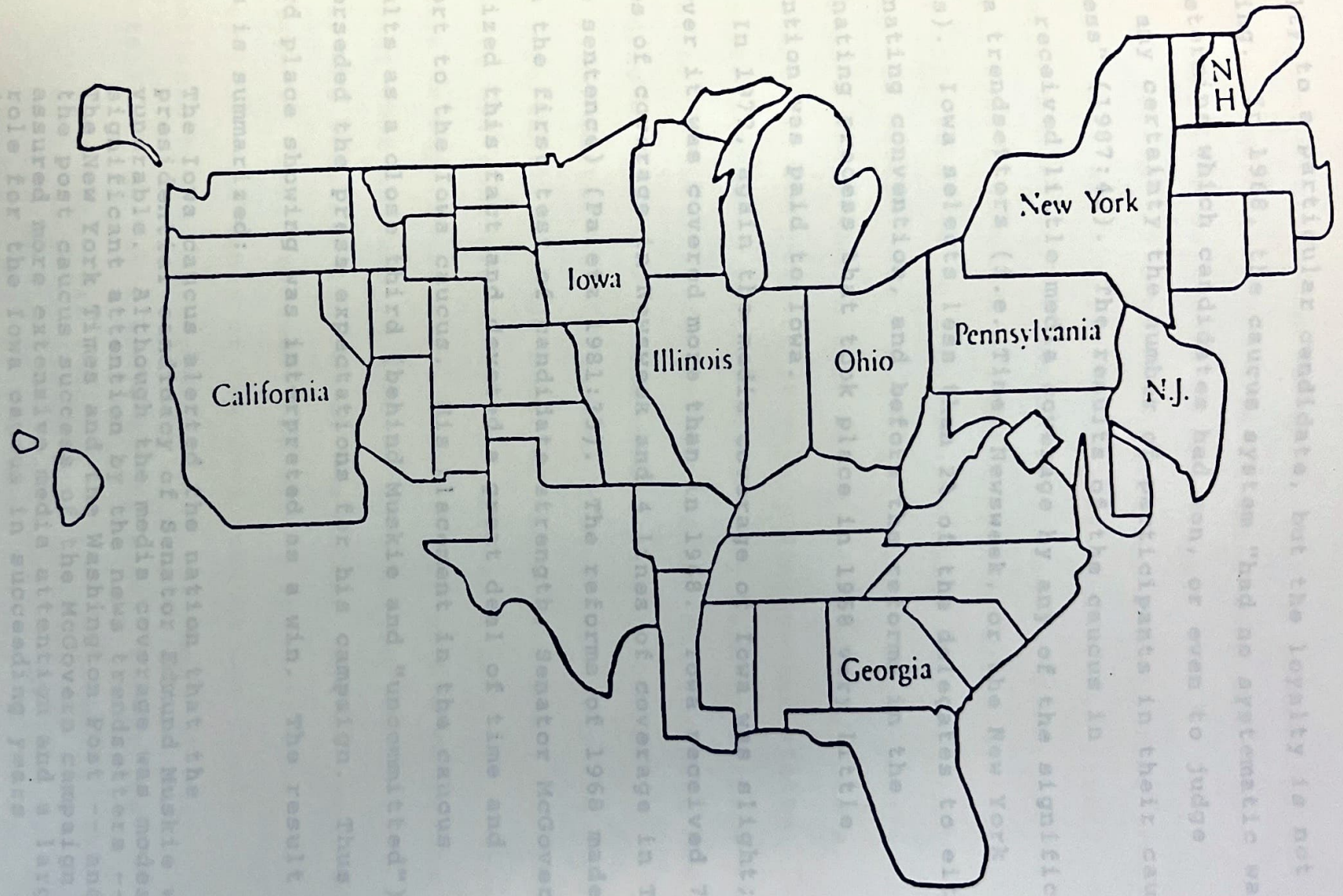

FIGURE 3.2

STATES IN PROPORTION TO ELECTORAL VOTES

Taken from William C. Adams, "As New Hamphire Goes...," Media and Momentum, Ed. Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), 42-45.

loyalty to a particular candidate, but the loyalty is not binding. In 1968, the caucus system "had no systematic way to determine which candidates had won, or even to judge with any certainty the number of participants in their caucus process" (1987:42). The results of the caucus in 1968 received little media coverage by any of the significant media trendsetters (i.e. Time, Newsweek, or the New York Times). Iowa selects less than 2% of the delegates to either nominating convention, and before the reforms in the nominating process that took place in 1968 very little attention was paid to Iowa.

In 1972, again the media coverage of Iowa was slight; however it was covered more than in 1968. Iowa received 72 lines of coverage in Newsweek and 4 lines of coverage in Time (one sentence) (Paletz 1981:35). The reforms of 1968 made Iowa the first test of candidate strength, Senator McGovern realized this fact and devoted a great deal of time and effort to the Iowa caucus. His placement in the caucus results as a close third (behind Muskie and "uncommitted") superseded the press expectations for his campaign. Thus the third place showing was interpreted as a win. The result of this is summarized:

> The Iowa caucus alerted the nation that the presidential candidacy of Senator Edmund Muskie was vunerable. Although the media coverage was modest, significant attention by the news trendsetters -- The New York Times and the Washington Post -- and the post caucus success of the McGovern campaign assured more extensive media attention and a larger role for the Iowa caucus in succeeding years (1987:64).

Iowa, henceforth, became the first testing ground for the candidates and the first forum in which they would have to prove themselves as viable to the media.

The year of 1976 was a pivotal one for the Iowa precinct caucus. This was the year that Iowa established itself as the major media test of candidate strength. According to one writer, this phenomenon did not happen by accident. Iowa party officials, as well as, businessmen, realized that making the caucus into a major media event would profit the state as a whole and so they attempted to secure Iowa's importance in the primary process. Winebrenner states, "... the state political parties worked very hard to attract the attention of the presidential candidates and the news media, including observing a common caucus date" (1987:87).

Jimmy Carter "won" the Iowa caucus that year and won, most importantly, a huge boost of media coverage. His 28% of the vote was interpreted by the media as a huge win, largely because he superseded their expectations of his campaign. The fact that he came in behind "uncommitted" which captured 37% of the vote was ignored by the media. And he received coverage in Time, Newsweek, and all of the networks. Thus, the central importance of the Iowa results was firmly established by the interpretation of the media of the importance of Carter's win. As one writer summarizes:

> News reporters contributed to the growth of the Iowa media event by extensively covering the 1976 caucus results as the first hard news in the presidential contest. Most of the major national print and broadcast media sent representatives to cover the process, and the three networks planned live caucus

> coverage on January 19. The networks did not, however, set up temporary studios or move their news anchors to Des Moines as they would for future presidential caucuses (1987:67).

Carter, after winning Iowa, continued to outrun media expectations and gained momentum which propelled him to the White House. Carter's success gave more validity to the Iowa results as a test of strength, and by 1980 Iowa was firmly entrenched as a major media event.

By 1980 Iowa had emerged as a major media event and one that required candidate time and attention. Iowa was now the first "real" test of the campaign. This is explained by Winebrenner:

> The Iowa precinct caucuses were the opening round in the 1980 primary and caucus season. George McGovern's success in 1972 and Jimmy Carter's emergance as the Democratic frontrunner in 1976 assured the caucuses of a position of prominence in the presidential nominating game. Iowa now rivaled New Hampshire for media attention and as Ronald Reagan was to learn, the media expect all candidates to play the game in the early nominating contests. Most of the 1980 candidates realized that Iowa had become a significant part of the presidential race and committed their campaigns to major efforts in the precinct caucuses (1987:94).

Thus the media coverage of the 1980 caucuses was immense. The major national print and broadcast media were represented by about 300 reporters and technicians. Time and Newsweek increased their coverage of the results by approximately double the coverage given to the 1976 results. And all three networks set up temporary studios in Des Moines to report the results -- a change from 1976 -- and the caucus had become a media event.

Iowa had become a major media event in just two

presidential campaigns. One systematic study of election stories aired by the "CBS Evening News" during a twelve-month period from 1 July 1979 through 30 June 1980, indicates that coverage of the caucuses increased dramatically from 1976 to 1980. So much so, that by 1980 Iowa had replaced New Hampshire as the foremost media event of the campaign (1987:107). George Bush won the Iowa caucus that year in what Robinson called one the major medialities of the 1980 presidential campaign. He exceeded press expectations and gained substantial coverage as a reward. The "big win" of the Bush campaign was a media interpretation of the event. As Winebrenner states, "Actually the Bush margin of victory was anything but big -- a plurality of just over 2,000 out of 106,000 votes and it was an essentially meaningless beauty contest conducted for the media" (1987:128).

In 1984, Iowa was the determining factor for the success or demise of several campaigns. Before the caucus, media coverage of the candidates mirrored the results of national polls -- Mondale first, Glenn second, and Jackson third. The Iowa caucus results changed that. The Democratic caucus was attended by 85,000 voters (less than one-sixth the number who regularly vote Democratic in Iowa) (Adams 1987:52). This state has only gone Democratic once in the general election -- 1948 for Truman. But no matter how inconsequential Iowa is in the general election, in the primary season it is vital. The caucus results put Mondale ahead with 45% of the vote and

"measured against expectations, two outcomes attracted the most interest: (1) Glenn did poorly, winning only 5%; and (2) Hart unexpectedly placed second to Mondale, though he had only 15% (12,600 votes)" (Adams 1987:53). What resulted was a massive change in media coverage priorities. Hart, because he succeeded in doing better than the press expected him to, gained a substantial increase in press coverage. In the week after the caucus, Hart equalled airtime with Mondale on NBC, and received ten times the coverage he had received the week before on CBS. In contrast, the campaign of Senator Glenn was demolished by his showing in the caucus. Glenn's surprise loss was interpreted by the media to be a fatal blow to his campaign. The media began what was termed in the last chapter the "deathwatch," as the following excerpt illustrates: "Viewers were told that the events in Iowa were almost fatal for Glenn, who `tried to put on a brave front'(ABC) and whose new goal was `simply surviving'(NBC), hoping for `some emergency oxygen for his badly shaken campaign'(CBS)" (Adams 1987:53). Glenn's press coverage changed from lots of positive coverage, to less coverage which was almost entirely negative. Adams summarizes the effects of the Iowa caucus on the 1984 campaign:

> Despite the tiny segment of the electorate that participated, the media verdict was unequivocal, and the self-fulfilling power attributed to the caucuses was monumental. Said Tom Brokaw of NBC News on 21 February: `Senators Hart and Glenn traded places in Iowa. Hart moved up to number two. Glenn became an also-ran. The effect of this surprising reversal already is being felt in their campaigns' (1987:53).

Thus, the campaigns from 1968 to 1984 clearly illustrate the

transformation of the Iowa precinct caucus from an inconsequential delegate selection process to a major media event, and the first step in the media winnowing process.

What Does Iowa Mean?

The Iowa precinct caucus, by being the first delegate selection event of the nomination season, has been highlighted as a major test of candidate strength which has centered national attention on the caucuses thus profoundly affecting the caucus process itself. The increased media coverage and the resulting importance placed on the outcomes of the caucus is problematic because it gives the voter a distorted view of reality. The reality of the situation is that Iowa contains approximately 2.5% of the U.S. population and elected approximately 2% of the delegates to either convention. Furthermore, the Iowa precinct caucus is an event unique to Iowa which is a mostly rural state with primarily agricultural interests. As one writer states, "Iowa is not a microcosm of the nation. The lack of representativenes works to the advantage of some candidates and to the disadvantage of others, and in the process it may mislead the nation about the progress of a presidential campaign" (1987:13). In theory, a candidate could easily not participate in the Iowa caucus and still win the nomination because the number of delegates is so minimal. However, in practice doing well in the Iowa caucus is essential for media coverage, and media coverage is essential for the nomination.

Instead, the importance of the Iowa caucus is a media-contrived reality. As the following example illustrates:

> Roger Mudd [CBS Evening News, 1976]:
> "... no amount of bad-mouthing by the others can lessen the importance of Jimmy Carter's finish. He was the clear winner in this psychologically crucial test....so that candidate with that highly prized political momentum tonight is Jimmy Carter."
>
> The media had fashioned a version of reality based on their own needs, practices and imagining and foisted it upon actual campaign events. The Iowa "test" was "pychologically crucial" and the "momentum" was "highly prized" largely because the media said so (Paletz 1981:35).

The Iowa caucus is used as the first "hard news" indicator of the campaign, although the results are questionable due to the very nature of the caucus system itself. As Winebrenner states:

> "...media exploitation of the Iowa caucus process 1) disrupts the normal functioning of the local political process 2) may give a false image of the national poltical appeal of the candidates involved and 3) subjects the national electoral process to the influence of a contrived event (1987:18).

Thus, the extensive media coverage of the Iowa precinct caucus incorporates the media's theme of the horse-race into the nomination season. The Iowa caucus results, as interpreted by the media, shows who is ahead and who is behind. Wins and losses are largely interpreted with reliance upon preconceived media expectations [i.e. McGovern's unexpected strong showing to Muskie in 1972]. Furthermore, the media emphasizes one candidate over the others, thus creating clear winners and losers, with an emphasis on conflict and differences. Clearly, Iowa is one lap, and a very important lap, in the White House Derby.

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARY

The second lap for the candidates comes with the New Hampshire primary. The New Hampshire primary has had historical importance as the first primary for many years, unlike Iowa's new role. Since 1920 New Hampshire has had the first primary of the nomination season in order to coincide with Town Meeting Day. In 1952, the "beauty contest" of the presidential campaign began where a primary was held to gage support but the outcome was relatively meaningless because of the organizational structure of that time. Since 1968, the New Hampshire primary has increased in importance because of the reforms which gave nomination power to the people. New Hampshire has gained notoriety since every president since 1952 has won this primary. The results of the New Hampshire primary are treated by the media as hard news indicators of the successfulness of the candidates. This primary is treated as essential to the candidates.

The statistics behind New Hampshire are less than impressive. The 1980 census put the population at approximately 921,000 -- less than .5% of the United States population. It is the ninth smallest state and elects less than 2% of the delegates to either convention. Yet it receives a phenomenal amount of press coverage because of its placement on the primary calendar. Despite the almost inconsequential amount of actual delegates selected in the primary, New Hampshire recieves 15% to 20% of national television and newspaper coverage of all primaries and

caucuses (Orren and Polsby 1987:4). The reason for this is simple, New Hampshire is treated as one of the first hard news indicators of the race. The media seize the results of the primary because they interpret the results to be more definitive and reliable indicators of candidate strength than national polls. This is, however, the media's interpretation because national polls may arguably be more representative of candidate strength than the small, demographically unique state of New Hampshire. However, the result of the media's view of New Hampshire is summarized as follows:

> The result is that a win in the New Hampshire primary buys a candidate far more publicity than a win anywhere else. To cite one example when Jimmy Carter won the New Hampshire primary on 24 February 1976 receiving only 23,000 votes, he got his picture on the covers of both Time and Newsweek. When Henry Jackson won the Massachusetts primary just one week later with 164,000 votes his smiling features adorned neither cover (Mayer 1987:14).

Clearly, from this example it is seen that the extensive coverage and importance associated with the New Hampshire primary is a media interpretation of the events.

There are two basic elements to the argument that the New Hampshire primary is unwarranted of such media attention. The first is alluded to above, that is that the state is too small to deserve all the hoopla. By almost any measure -- overall population, size of primary electorate, or delegates at stake -- New Hampshire's share of the total is minuscule. The second argument states that New Hampshire's voters are unrepresentative of the country as a whole. That is that there are basically no Democratic moderates due to a lack of

unions and Blacks in the electorate (Orren and Polsby 1987:5).

But no matter how undeserving New Hampsire is of such attention, the fact of the matter is that the New Hampshire primary receives extensive media coverage and is thus essential to the presidential campaign. The importance of the New Hampshire primary has become a vicious circle. Mayer explains:

> The New Hampshire saga has now become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because the media cover New Hampshire so much; all the candidates have to wage vigorous campaigns there; and the media in turn claim that the only reason they are in New Hampshire is because candidates are there (1987:17).

The media relies on New Hampshire as a hard news test of candidate strength and gives substantial media coverage rewards to the winners while punishing the losers by ignoring them. This in turn creates a circle because the candidates need to get the campaign coverage, and the media needs the hard news results. Both parties participate in elevating the importance of the New Hampshire primary.

The media's interpretation of the New Hampshire primary is that a candidate is truly viable only if he/she succeeds in this primary. As Adams explains: "New Hampshire is not treated as simply an interesting preliminary contest. It is made into a definitive test. Which means disqualification for those candidates who do not pass with sufficiently high marks" (1987:51). The result of this frame of reference is that a win in New Hampshire not only receives a huge amount

of coverage but that win is interpreted as absolute proof of the strength of the candidate. This is summarized:

> Not only does a win in New Hampshire bring lots of publicity; the publicity is almost entirely positive. The victorous candidate is portrayed as popular, exciting, confident, in control; in short, a leader. His poll ratings are increasing; his organization is growing; his message is catching on; his crowds are large and enthusiastic. His opponents, by contrast are dead, dying or in disarray (Mayer 1987:14).

Thus, the New Hampshire primary is where the candidates are catagorized into the roles of winner and loser with all the conotations associated with those roles.

Studies conducted to determine the effect of the New Hampshire primary have shown it to have several consequences. Firstly, evidence suggests that New Hampshire's most powerful influence is its ability to elevate poorly known candidates into national contenders, especially in crowded multicandidate races. Secondly, failure in the New Hampshire primary -- media interpreted failure, that is not living up to media expectations -- can devastate a campaign. A poor showing in New Hampshire can start the stage called the deathwatch by the media. One study has shown that the New Hampshire primary effects are so powerful because of the timing of the primary. This primary appears to be the starting point for many voters to begin following intently the campaign. Table 3.2 illustrates that coverage in the wake of New Hampshire is extremely potent because it hits so many viewers as they are just tuning into the campaign.

Table 3.2 PUBLIC ATTENTIVENESS TO THE NOMINATION CAMPAIGN [2]

	pre-N.H. primary (1/11-2/28)	post-N.H. primary (2/29-4/10)	post-Penn primary (4/11-5/8)	post-Ohio primary (5/9-6/6)
follow campaign on T.V.	28%	45%	39%	37%
follow campaign in news-papers	17	29	24	19
attempt to persuade others	14	25	28	26
interested in campaign	46	46	44	48

Thus, the New Hampshire primary as the first event in the delegate selection process receives substantial media coverage and is the arena in which candidates are cast into media roles such as "winner" or "loser." The intrinsic importance of New Hampshire is questionable because of its small size, but its importance to the presidential race is enormous because of the amount, type and timing of the media coverage.

EFFECTS OF IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

The effects of the media's coverage of the Iowa and New Hampshire delegate selection events have been touched on

[2] Table 3.2 and the information pertaining to it are taken from the article by William C. Adams "As New Hampshire Goes ..." **Media and Momentum**, ed. Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House, 1987), 54.

above but a discussion of effects must include "momentum." Viewers of the 1988 presidential campaign will recall George Bush's triumphant declaration after his win in New Hampshire that now he had the "big mo." Momentum refers to the bandwagon effect, that is, that the campaign gains prestige and support as more and more people join in. Paletz explains:

> First, name recognition appears to be a major factor in primary voting. Second, portrayal as the man to beat creates a bandwagon effect that stimulates primary voters, campaign contributors, party officals, convention delegates and contributors to hop on board before it's too late (1981:38).

A win in Iowa or New Hampshire gives the candidate a huge increase over all the other candidates in media coverage, that leads to increased name recognition. In contrast, a candidate who loses Iowa or New Hampshire is either ignored by the media or cast as a loser which effects their campaign as they lose momentum as people jump off the bandwagon. This is explained as follows:

> Most people vote for the candidate they like the best (or dislike the least) among those who appear viable...protest votes and other special cases excepted, most people do not want to waste their votes on a lost cause. Preferences swing toward the most tolerable candidate who has a chance -- hence, the devastating impact of being branded `hopeless' in the aftermath of New Hampshire (Adams 1987:57).

Therefore, a viable candidate is determined by a strong finish in Iowa or New Hampshire because of the emphasis on these events by the media.

A look at the withdrawal patterns of candidates after New Hampshire proves the impact of a loss in this key state.

Table 3.3 shows the withdrawal date of candidates in multicandidate races in the elections of 1972 - 1984.

Table 3.3. SELECTED WITHDRAWAL DATES IN MULTICANDIDATE PRESIDENTIAL RACES, 1972-84[4]

1972 Democratic Nomination Race	
7 March	New Hampshire Primary
4 April	John Lindsay withdraws
27 April	Edmund Muskie withdraws
2 May	Henry Jackson withdraws
22 May	Eugene McCarthy withdraws
1976 Democratic Nomination Race	
24 February	New Hampshire Primary
4 March	Birch Bayh withdraws
12 March	Milton Shapp withdraws
22 March	Sargent Shriver withdraws
8 April	Fred Harris withdraws
1 May	Henry Jackson withdraws
1980 Republican and Democratic Nomination Race	
26 February	New Hampshire Primary
5 March	Howard Baker withdraws
9 March	John Connally withdraws
15 March	Robert Dole withdraws
1 April	Jerry Brown withdraws
17 April	Phil Crane withdraws
22 April	John Anderson announces intention to run as an independent
1984 Democratic Nomination Race	
28 February	New Hampshire Primary
29 February	Alan Cranston withdraws
1 March	Ernest Hollings and Reubin Askew withdraw
14 March	George McGovern withdraws
16 March	John Glenn withdraws

4 Table 3.3 and the information pertaining to it is taken from William G. Mayer "The New Hampshire Primary: A Historical Overview," **Media and Momentum**, ed. Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House, 1987), 24.

This table suggests that the importance and the power of the New Hampshire primary as an elimination device has increased as the importance of Iowa has also increased. It is clear that the withdrawal period has been shortened from six to eight weeks following the New Hampshire primary to approximately two weeks following this primary. This is due to the fact that Iowa has increasingly become the first test of the season. If a candidate fails in Iowa, he has to win New Hampshire or his campaign is over. This, of course, disadvantages candidates whose support is concentrated in later states. Even though more delegates may be awarded in later primaries, media coverage and the resulting momentum come from the first delegate selection events: Iowa and New Hampshire.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be seen that the reforms of 1968 marked a fundamental shift in nomination politics. With the nomination power in the hands of the people, the media became the vital information link. This elevated the importance of the media and the media interpretation of the events became the reality of the race. The reporting of Iowa and New Hampshire as hard news is a journalistic interpretation of these events. It is media perception that makes the Iowa and New Hampshire contests important indicators of candidate strength. The winnowing function is now performed by the press by their coverage of these events and the subsequent

casting of the candidates into winner and loser roles. The way in which these contests are reported is problematic because the results are less definitive than the viewer is led to believe. Hence, the transformation of the Iowa precinct caucus and the New Hampshire primary into and major tests of candidate strength is a media-conceived reality.

CHAPTER 5

THE FINISH LINE

Conclusion: Who Wins? Who Loses?

A central premise of this thesis has been that the structure of an institution affects the output of that institution. In the study of media and elections, the structure of television has a great deal to do with the type of coverage that the campaign receives. Likewise, the structure of the election has a great deal to do with the type of candidate selected. As the system works now, the concentration on competition propels the candidate who can appear to win in the eyes of the media to the front-runner status. As stated before, media perception of events is the reality of the race despite the fact that this reality is distorted.

At this point in this thesis, the idealist reader is depressed and the pessimistic reader is apathetic. What can be done to change this structure? It appears to me that there are three players in the game: the media, the candidate/government, and the viewer/voter. One or more of these groups must unite in favor of a change in the structure of the system in order for change to take place. It is my opinion that if change is going to occur (change being less stress on competition, more emphasis on issues, egalitarian primary coverage etc.) that it will not be due to the efforts of the media or the viewer/voter. My reasons for this conclusion are as follows: firstly, there are very few

incentives for the media to change their existing format. Sure, the news organizations like to think of themselves as "informers of the public", but they are also profit-making organizations and the present formula is working. Secondly, the notion of a free press, and all that entails, is firmly embodied in the American psyche. Competition, drama, and excitement are the criteria for a newsworthy subject. American journalism is journalism of exception not processes. News is the exciting tid-bit of information not the complex, perhaps boring, explanation. Thirdly, we can look to the example of attempted media reform that came with the UNESCO McBride Commission and the study of foreign news coverage. This study had literally hundreds of suggestions for media reform that would have resulted in a type of journalism that concentrated on processes and understanding of the events. The report was met with hostility by the media and eventually ignored.

My reason for doubting that viewers/voters will be the impetus for change is more simplistic. As the first chapter explained, most viewers perceive themselves to be informed. They perceive that the problem is with the candidates, the government or the world. One problem with journalism of exception is that bad things are all that is ever happening. The competition that is emphasized between the candidates leaves the viewer with a sense that the campaign is negative: stupid politicans don't have anything better to do but pick on each other. The casting of the candidates and the

emphasis on competition, leaves the viewer/voter with the perception that they are chosing between Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee. So who cares anyhow.

It is my view then that change would occur only if the candidate/government were to change the system. There are several ways in which, theoretically, this could take place. The first would be a return to the pre-1968 system where party bosses picked the viable candidates. This would, in theory, take the winnowing power back from the voters, but as we have seen the winnowing function is really performed by the media. This would probably meet heavy resistance from primary states which profit from the existing system such as Iowa and New Hampshire. As well as that it is "undemocratic" to take voting power away from the citizens and give it to elitist politicans, and we all know how corrupt they are since the media tell us so.

A second reform would be to change the structure of the primary period to a "Super Tuesday" event. This would decrease the primary calendar, and decrease the power of Iowa and New Hampshire. Then, in theory, states with the most electoral votes would be covered. This reform has other consequences, however, it would favor candidates with high name recognition and candidates able to perform well in big industrial states. It would, in all probability, not decrease the time devoted to the primary period but the media would have even less hard news indicators so would probably fashion some of their own. It is also my opinion that

neither of these changes will occur in the near future.

Furthermore, looking in my crystal ball, I believe that Iowa has reached its peak in importance. I do not believe the media can elevate it any farther. I also doubt the validity of the Iowa caucus as a successful determinant of candidate viability. New Hampshire, on the other hand, has somehow managed to select the winning candidate for nearly forty years. That is an impressive record. I do not believe Iowa is as successful. For instance, look at the 1988 race -- Dole and Gephardt -- the momentum from Iowa clearly did not get them terribly far. Instead I believe, the media will fashion another test and Iowa will decrease in importance.

I find all of this depressing, but believe it or not there is one school of thought which purports that this is the best way to select a president. This is because the candidate who wins is the best at communicating through the media and this is believed to be the most important quality for a president. They cite Reagan as their example.

Nevertheless, the White House Derby will, in all probablity, continue to be the way in which a president is selected. I do not believe this is the best way for the process to occur but it is presently the system. This thesis has attempted to explore an area that affects us all; as citizens, as viewers, as voters. If we become more aware of our enviroment and the faults within ourselves and the institutions in which we must function, we are then able to

make informed changes. This thesis has attempted to make you aware of a process and a system we all take for granted. Becoming aware is often the hardest part, but through awareness change is possible.

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