

It follows from this that once successful routines are established or reestablished for winning office, there is no motivation among party leaders to disturb the routines of the game. These routines are disturbed not by adaptive change within the party-policy system, but by the application of overwhelming external force.

66

DAVID BRODER

From *The Party's Over*

As his book title cleverly implies, journalist David Broder acknowledges the decline of American political parties. Writing in the early 1970s, he mourns their weakening and holds out hope for a reinvigorated party system. Broder attributes many of America's governmental problems to the parties' problems, and he pleads for stronger party unity in Congress and an expanded role for parties in the campaign process. Turning to voters, Broder asks for less ticket-splitting and more partisan allegiance. As the decades have passed, Broder's observations about the decline of the parties—dealignment, as scholars term it—have been borne out. His hopes for the rejuvenation of American political parties have proved less promising. Among most voters and even many office-holders, the Democratic and Republican parties are no longer the heart of the American political process.

MY VIEW IS that American politics is at an impasse, that we have been spinning our wheels for a long, long time; and that we are going to dig ourselves ever deeper into trouble, unless we find a way to develop some political traction and move again. I believe we can get that traction, we can make government responsible and responsive again, only when we begin to use the political parties as they are meant to be used. And that is the thesis of this book.

It is called *The Party's Over*, not in prophecy, but in alarm. I am not predicting the demise of the Republicans or the Democrats. Party loyalties have been seriously eroded, the Democratic and Republican organizations weakened by years of neglect. But our parties are not yet dead. What happens to them is up to us to decide. If we allow them to wither, we will pay a high price in the continued frustration of government. But, even if we seek their renewal, the cost of repairing the effects of decades

of governmental inaction will be heavy. The process will be painful and expensive. Whatever the fate of our political parties, for America the party is over. . . .

. . . The reason we have suffered governmental stalemate is that we have not used the one instrument available to us for disciplining government to meet our needs. That instrument is the political party.

Political parties in America have a peculiar status and history. They are not part of our written Constitution. The Founding Fathers, in fact, were determined to do all they could to see they did not arise. Washington devoted much of his Farewell Address to warning his countrymen against "the dangers of party in the state." And yet parties arose in the first generation of the nation, and have persisted ever since. Their very durability argues that they fill a need. That need is for some institution that will sort out, weigh, and, to the extent possible, reconcile the myriad conflicting needs and demands of individuals, groups, interests, communities and regions in this diverse continental Republic, organize them for the contest for public office; and then serve as a link between the constituencies and the men chosen to govern. When the parties fill their mission well, they tend to serve both a unifying and a clarifying function for the country. Competitive forces draw them to the center, and force them to seek agreement on issues too intense to be settled satisfactorily by simple majority referendum. On the other hand, as grand coalitions, they are capable of taking a need felt strongly by some minority of the population and making it part of a program endorsed by a majority.

When they do not function well, things go badly for America. The coming of the Civil War was marked by a failure of the reconciling function of the existing parties. Long periods of stagnation, too, can be caused by the failure of the parties to bring emerging public questions to the point of electoral decision. When the parties fail, individual citizens feel they have lost control of what is happening in politics and in government. They find themselves powerless to influence the course of events. Voting seems futile and politics a pointless charade. . . .

The governmental system is not working because the political parties are not working. The parties have been weakened by their failure to adapt to some of the social and technological changes taking place in America. But, even more, they are suffering from simple neglect: neglect by Presidents and public officials, but, particularly, neglect by the voters. It is to remind us that the parties can be used for positive purposes that this book is written.

Some students of government who share this view of the importance of political parties in American government nonetheless think it futile to

exhort readers on their behalf. Such political scientists as James L. Sundquist and Walter Dean Burnham, whose knowledge of American political history is far deeper than my own, believe we are simply in the wrong stage of the political cycle to expect anything but confused signals and weak responses from the parties.

The last major party realignment, it is generally agreed, took place in 1932, and set the stage for the New Deal policies of government intervention in the economy and the development of the welfare state. We are, these scholars argue, perhaps overdue for another realignment, but until an issue emerges which will produce one, an issue as powerful as the Great Depression, it is futile to complain that party lines are muddled and governmental action is all but paralyzed. Their judgment may be correct, but I do not find it comforting. The cyclical theory of party realignment is an easy rationalization for throwing up our hands and doing nothing. But we do not know when the realignment will take place. Some scholars have thought there was a thirty-six-year cycle, with 1896 and 1932 as the last "critical elections." But 1968, the scheduled date, on this theory, for another "critical election," has come and gone, and our drift continues. . . .

. . . Basically, I believe that our guarantee of self-government is no stronger than our exercise of self-government; and today the central instruments of self-government, the political parties, are being neglected or abused. We must somehow rescue them if we are to rescue ourselves. . . .

. . . Popular dissatisfaction with the two-party system is manifested in many ways: by the decline in voting; by the rise in the number of voters who refuse to identify themselves with either party; by the increase in ticket splitting, a device for denying either party responsibility for government; and by the increased use of third parties or ad hoc political coalitions to pressure for change. . . . Is there not a better way to resolve our differences, to move ahead on our common problems? I believe there is. . . . The instrument that is available to us . . . is the instrument of responsible party government. The alternative to making policy in the streets is to make it in the voting booth. . . .

But, if that is to be more than a cliché answer, there must be real choices presented at election time—choices involving more than a selection between two sincere-sounding, photogenic graduates of some campaign consultant's academy of political and dramatic arts. The candidates must come to the voters with programs that are comprehensible and relevant to our problems; and they must have the kind of backing that makes it possible for them to act on their pledges once in office.

The instrument, the only instrument I know of, that can nominate such candidates, commit them to a program and give them the leverage and alliances in government that can enable them to keep their promises, is the political party. . . .

. . . Where do we turn? To ourselves. Obviously, that must be the answer. There is no solution for America except what we Americans devise. I believe that we have the instrument at hand, in the party system, that can break the long and costly impasse in our government. But it is up to us to decide whether to use it.

What would it entail on our part if we determined to attempt responsible party government? First, it would mean giving strong public support to those reform efforts which in the recent past have been carried on entirely by a small group of concerned political insiders, aimed at strengthening the machinery of political parties and government.

We should seek to strengthen the liaison between the presidency and Congress, on a mutual basis, and between the presidency and the heads of state and local government. We should elect the President in the same way we elect all other officials, by direct vote of his constituents, with high man winning.

We should expand the role and responsibilities of the party caucuses and the party leaders in Congress. The caucus should choose the floor leaders and policy committee members, the legislative committee chairmen and committee members, not on the basis of seniority but on the basis of ability and commitment to the party program. That leadership ought to be held accountable for bringing legislation to which the party is committed to a floor vote in orderly and timely fashion, with adequate opportunity for debate and particularly for consideration of opposition party alternatives. But procedures for due consideration should not justify devices like the filibuster, which prevent the majority party from bringing its measures to a final vote. . . .

We need to take every possible measure to strengthen the presidential nominating convention as the key device for making the parties responsible. The current effort to open the Democratic delegate-selection process to wider public participation is a promising start, and its emphasis on the congressional-district nominating convention offers corollary benefits for integrating congressional and presidential constituencies. Both parties should experiment with devices for putting heavier emphasis on the platform-writing phase of the convention's work, including the possibility of a separate convention, following the nomination, where the party's officeholders and candidates debate the program on which they pledge themselves to run and to act if elected.

Most important of all the structural reforms, we need to follow through the effort to discipline the use of money in politics, not only by setting realistic limits on campaign spending and by publicizing individual and organizational gifts, but also by channeling much more of the money (including, in my view, all general election spending) through the respective party committees, rather than through individual candidates' treasuries.

We need to strengthen the party organizations and their staffs, and recapture for them the campaign management functions that have been parceled out to independent firms which tend to operate with a fine disdain for the role of party and policy in government. We need to devise ways to make television—the prime medium of political communication—somewhat more sensitive to the claims of the parties to be a regular part of the political dialogue, and to protect the vital institution of the nominating convention from being distorted by the demands of the television cameras.

All these reforms would help, I believe, but they would not accomplish the invigoration of responsible party government unless they were accompanied by a genuine increase in the participation by the public in party affairs. The cure for the ills of democracy truly is more democracy; our parties are weak principally because we do not use them. To be strong and responsible, our parties must be representative; and they can be no more representative than our participation allows. Millions more of us need to get into partisan political activity.

We need also to become somewhat more reflective about what we do with our votes. We need to ask ourselves what it is that we want government to accomplish, and which candidate, which party comes closest to espousing that set of goals. That may sound so rationalistic as to be unrealistic. But this nation has more education, more communication, more leisure available to it than ever before. In the nineteenth century, James Bryce wrote of us, "The ordinary citizens are interested in politics, and watch them with intelligence, the same kind of intelligence (though a smaller quantity of it) as they apply to their own business. . . . They think their own competence equal to that of their representatives and office-bearers; and they are not far wrong." Are we to think less of ourselves today?

Finally, we need to examine some of our habits. It seems to me we should ask, before splitting a ticket, what it is we hope to accomplish by dividing between the parties the responsibility for government of our country, our state or our community. Do we think there is no difference between the parties? Do we distrust them both so thoroughly that we

wish to set them against each other? Do we think one man so superior in virtue and wisdom that he must be put in office, no matter who accompanies him there? Why are we splitting our tickets? My guess is that, if we asked those questions, we would more often be inclined to give a temporary grant of power to one party at a time, rather than dividing responsibility so skillfully between the parties that neither can govern. If we were willing to risk this strategy, knowing that we would be able to throw the rascals out if they failed, we might even discover to our amazement that they are not always rascals.

67

XANDRA KAYDEN AND EDDIE MAHE

From *The Party Goes On*

No student of American politics can doubt that political parties have weakened. Xandra Kayden and Eddie Mahe are both political party consultants—Democratic and Republican, respectively—and they admit that old-style party activism is a thing of the past. Campaigning is increasingly professionalized; envelope-lickers, doorbell-ringers, and sign-holders are relics of a bygone time. Yet Kayden and Mahe envision a new era in which party organizers capitalize on the changed political climate. Those people who will rebuild the parties to succeed in the future will utilize technological tools suitable to the times. Test the Kayden and Mahe prediction of how a political "party goes on" against the following events: Bill Clinton's 1992 victory over President Bush; Ross Perot's winning 19 percent of the vote in 1992; the Republicans' 1994 House and Senate victories led by former Speaker Newt Gingrich and the "Contract with America"; and the 1996 and 2000 presidential and congressional contests.

IN MANY RESPECTS, the party of the future is here; it is the gap in perception of this fact that binds us to the past. If a new animal is lurking in the guise of a dead system, it will emerge sooner or later, and there may not be anything to be done about it at all. We think it is important to know what has happened and to consider the possibilities for the future, partly because it is our system of government and something we must responsibly cherish, and partly because we still seem intent on

(21)

the debate that was denied in the context of my nomination. We will have lost more than any one individual's opportunity for public service if we fail to pursue the public thirst for information about, and positive-sum solutions to, the issues at the heart of this controversy. The twentieth-century problem—the problem of the color line, according to W. E. B. Du Bois—will soon become a twenty-first-century problem if we allow opposing viewpoints to be silenced on issues of race and racism.

I hope that we can learn three positive lessons from my experience. The first lesson is that those who stand for principles may lose in the short run, but they cannot be suppressed in the long run. The second lesson is that public dialogue is critical to represent all perspectives; no one viewpoint should be permitted to monopolize, distort, caricature, or shape public debate. The tyranny of The Majority is just as much a problem of silencing minority viewpoints as it is of excluding minority representatives or preferences. We cannot all talk at once, but that does not mean only one group should get to speak. We can take turns. Third, we need consensus and positive-sum solutions. We need a broad public conversation about issues of racial justice in which we seek win-win solutions to real-life problems. If we include blacks and whites, and women and men, and Republicans and Democrats, and even people with new ideas, we will all be better off.

22

61

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON

From *Dirty Politics*

One of the most memorable campaign ads from a presidential election is the famous—or infamous—1988 Willie Horton ad. The original ad came from a political action committee (PAC) independent of President Bush's campaign. Political scientist Kathleen Hall Jamieson describes the content of the anti-Dukakis message. It showed William Horton, whom the ad referred to as "Willie," a convicted murderer, who had been given a weekend furlough while Michael Dukakis was governor of Massachusetts. The ad tells viewers that during this furlough, Horton kidnapped a couple and stabbed the man and raped the woman. Jamieson examines the Bush campaign's follow-up spot and reveals how the Willie Horton story became a drama, filled with dangerous misinterpretations and untrue implications about the crime. William Horton was black. The couple was white. The Republicans had successfully played the "race card," with fear being a winning issue in the 1988 presidential election.

From *Dirty Politics*

ALMOST THREE YEARS after George Bush decisively defeated Democrat Michael Dukakis to become the president of the United States, a group of voters in Pineville, Louisiana, was asked, "Can you tell me what you remember as being important in the 1988 presidential campaign?" The individuals in the group responded.

Hmm.

I'm trying to think.
1988?

LEADER: '88.

That's the last one.

Dukakis.

That was Dukakis.

It's about time for another one isn't it?

That time again. It was Dukakis wasn't it?

I just knew I couldn't vote for him.

Seems like the Democratic man that ran, he had a lot of problems. His wife and so forth.

A lot of that didn't come out 'til after the election, though.
That's right.

A lot of us didn't know of her personal problems. They hid . . . that was pretty well hid. She admitted that was . . . I don't know that was a . . .

I think the big thing against him was that, wasn't his criminal . . . I mean not his criminal record, but his . . . the handling of, um . . .

The handling of his state programs.

His state programs. I think that influenced a lot of people, how they voted.

And again, it was still a social aspect of dealing with social issues. And, uh, Bush was more international and people developing things for themselves. Giving them an opportunity to do their own thing and that will support our country. By that I mean build up business and the taxes then, and the income from growth and everything will take care of our country. I saw those as two distinct things.

FOCUS GROUP LEADER: You had just mentioned how he handled state issues. Can you think of any specific issues?

Well, I think right off the . . . the one I'm thinking about was his . . . his handling of a criminal, um, and I can't right now . . .

What do you mean, a pardon of someone who has . . .

Willie Horton.

Yeah. A pardon.

Pardon.

Yeah. He pardoned that guy that went out and killed someone.

Afterwards. You know, he released this known . . . I guess he was a murderer wasn't he? Originally. And they released him anyway and he went out and killed

Immediately and killed people again.

Right after getting out.

And this was brought out that he was releasing people really without seemingly too much thought. I think that had a lot to do with it.

William Horton and Michael Dukakis are now twinned in our memory. The fact that the memories are factually inaccurate does not diminish their power. Dukakis did not pardon Horton nor did the furloughed convict kill.

Although it does recount the facts of the Horton case, this chapter is not one more rehash of who did what to whom in the 1988 campaign. Instead, it sets a context for the book by examining how voters and reporters came to know what they know of politics. It argues that, in politics as in life, what is known is not necessarily what is believed, what is shown is not necessarily what is seen, and what is said is not necessarily what is heard. It then examines how in the Horton case consultants exploited the psychological quirks that characterize humans.

These quirks include a pack-rat-like tendency to gather up and interrelate information from various places, a disposition to weigh accessible, dramatic data more heavily than abstract statistical information, and a predilection for letting fears shape perception of what constitutes "fact."

At the same time, we have conventionalized journalistic norms that reward messages that are dramatic, personal, concise, visual, and take the form of narrative. In 1988, the psychological dispositions of the public coupled with the news norms to produce an environment in which an atypical but dramatic personification of deep-seated fears would displace other issues and dominate the discourse of the campaign. That dramatic, visual, personalized narrative told the "story" of William Horton.

The role that ads, Bush rhetoric, news, and audience psychology played in transforming William Horton's name for some into a symbol of the terrors of crime and for others of the exploitation of racist fears shows the powerful ways in which messages interact and the varying responses they evoke in individuals. Like pack rats, voters gather bits and pieces of political information and store them in a single place. Lost in the storage is a clear recall of where this or that "fact" came from. Information obtained from news mixes with that from ads, for example.

Although Bush had been telling the tale on the stump since June, in the second week in September 1988, the Horton story broke into prime time in the form of a National Security Political Action Committee

(NSPAC) ad. The ad tied Michael Dukakis to a convicted murderer who had jumped furlough and gone on to rape a Maryland woman and assault her fiancé. The convict was black, the couple white.*

The ad opens with side-by-side pictures of Dukakis and Bush. Dukakis's hair is unkempt, the photo dark. Bush, by contrast, is smiling and bathed in light. As the pictures appear, an announcer says "Bush and Dukakis on crime." A picture of Bush flashes on the screen. "Bush supports the death penalty for first-degree murderers." A picture of Dukakis. "Dukakis not only opposes the death penalty, he allowed first degree murderers to have weekend passes from prison." A close-up mug shot of Horton flashes onto the screen. "One was Willie Horton, who murdered a boy in a robbery, stabbing him nineteen times." A blurry black-and-white photo of Horton apparently being arrested appears. "Despite a life sentence, Horton received ten weekend passes from prison." The words "kidnapping," "stabbing," and "raping" appear on the screen with Horton's picture as the announcer adds, "Horton fled, kidnapping a young couple, stabbing the man and repeatedly raping his girlfriend." The final photo again shows Michael Dukakis. The announcer notes "Weekend prison passes. Dukakis on crime."

When the Bush campaign's "revolving door" ad began to air on October 5, viewers read Horton from the PAC ad into the furlough ad. This stark black-and-white Bush ad opened with bleak prison scenes. It then cut to a procession of convicts circling through a revolving gate and marching toward the nation's living rooms. By carefully juxtaposing words and pictures, the ad invited the false inference that 268 first-degree murderers were furloughed by Dukakis to rape and kidnap. As the bleak visuals appeared, the announcer said that Dukakis had vetoed the death penalty and given furloughs to "first-degree murderers not eligible for parole. While out, many committed other crimes like kidnapping and rape."

The furlough ad contains three false statements and invites one illegitimate inference. The structure of the ad prompts listeners to hear "first-degree murderers not eligible for parole" as the antecedent referent for "many." Many of whom committed crimes? First-degree murderers not eligible for parole. Many of whom went on to commit crimes like kidnapping and rape? First-degree murderers not eligible for parole.

*In his article "The Road to Here," included in Larry Sabato's *Toward the Millennium: The Elections of 1996*, journalist Tom Rosenstiel points out that much negative campaigning ironically originates in the primaries among fellow party members. It was fellow Democrat Al Gore who first unearthed the Willie Horton incident regarding Democrat Michael Dukakis during the presidential primaries in 1988.—EDS.

But many unparoleable first-degree murderers did not escape. Of the 268 furloughed convicts who jumped furlough during Dukakis's first two terms, only four had ever been convicted first-degree murderers not eligible for parole. Of those four not "many" but one went on to kidnap and rape. That one was William Horton. By flashing "268 escaped" on the screen as the announcer speaks of "many first-degree murderers," the ad invites the false inference that 268 murderers jumped furlough to rape and kidnap. Again, the single individual who fits this description is Horton. Finally, the actual number who were more than four hours late in returning from furlough during Dukakis's two and a half terms was not 268 but 275. In Dukakis's first two terms, 268 escapes were made by the 11,497 individuals who were given a total of 67,378 furloughs. In the ten-year period encompassing his two completed terms and the first two years of his third term (1987-88), 275 of 76,455 furloughs resulted in escape.

This figure of 275 in ten years compares with 269 who escaped in the three years in which the program was run by Dukakis's Republican predecessor, who created the furlough program.

Still the battle of drama against data continued. After the Bush campaign's furlough ad had been on the air for two and a half weeks, in the third week of October, PAC ads featuring the victims of Horton began airing. One showed the man whose fiancée had been raped by the furloughed Horton. "Mike Dukakis and Willie Horton changed our lives forever," said Cliff Barnes, speaking in tight close-up. "He was serving a life term, without the possibility of a parole, when Governor Dukakis gave him a few days off. Horton broke into our home. For twelve hours, I was beaten, slashed, and terrorized. My wife, Angie, was brutally raped. When his liberal experiment failed, Dukakis simply looked away. He also vetoed the death penalty bill. Regardless of the election, we are worried people don't know enough about Mike Dukakis."

The second ad was narrated by the sister of the teenager killed by Horton. "Governor Dukakis's liberal furlough experiments failed. We are all victims. First, Dukakis let killers out of prison. He also vetoed the death penalty. Willie Horton stabbed my teenage brother nineteen times. Joey died. Horton was sentenced to life without parole, but Dukakis gave him a furlough. He never returned. Horton went on to rape and torture others. I worry that people here don't know enough about Dukakis's record." The words that recur in the two ads are: "liberal," "experiment," "rape," worry that "people don't know enough about Dukakis," "vetoed the death penalty."

Taken together the ads created a coherent narrative. Dukakis fur-

24

loughed Horton (PAC ads), just as he had furloughed 267 other escapees (Bush revolving door ad). Horton raped a woman and stabbed her fiancé (crime-quiz and victim PAC ads). Viewers could infer what must have happened to the victims of the other 267 escapees. . . .

The Horton narrative fit the requirements of news. Unlike the "soft" news found in feature stories of the sort pioneered by Charles Kuralt on television, hard news is about an event that treats an issue of ongoing concern. Because violent crime is dramatic, conflict ridden, evokes intense emotions, disrupts the social order, threatens the community, and can be verified by such official sources as police, it is "newsworthy." If one believed Bush's version of the facts, a convicted murderer who should have been executed had been furloughed to rape, torture, and murder again. In newscasts, the villain Horton appeared incarnated in a menacing mug shot. To personalize and dramatize, the news camera showed him in close-up; the less inflammatory visuals in the controversial PAC ad were shot mid-screen. Appearing in tight close-ups both in news and in the ads, the sister of the teenager Horton allegedly killed and the fiancé and now husband of the woman he raped told of their torment and urged a vote against the second villain in the story, Michael Dukakis. . . .

Helping propel the false generalizations from the isolated case of Horton to hordes of others who presumably did what he had done were complex and unspoken references to race. "Crime" became a shorthand signal," note Thomas and Mary Edsall, "to a crucial group of white voters, for broader issues of social disorder, evoking powerful ideas about authority, status, morality, self-control, and race." "Any reference to capital punishment," argues political scientist Murray Edelman, "is also a reference to the need to restrain blacks and the poor from violence. The liberal argument that poor people and blacks are disproportionately targeted by capital punishment laws doubtless fuels this fear in a part of the public. That the association is subtle makes it all the more potent, for 'capital punishment,' like all condensation symbols, draws its intensity from the associations it represses." Without actually voicing the repressed associations, the image of Horton on the screen as the announcer notes that Dukakis opposes the death penalty serves to raise them. "Weekend Passes" [which I have called the Horton ad] is not about Willie Horton," says NSPAC's Floyd Brown. "It's about the death penalty. George Bush stood on the side of the majority. Michael Dukakis stood on the side of the minority. The death penalty is where we win our audience."

The 1990 General Social Survey of Racial Stereotyping among White Americans demonstrates that racial prejudice correlates with support for

capital punishment. According to Kinder and Mendelberg, "white Americans who regard blacks as inferior are quite a bit more likely to favor the death penalty for convicted murderers."

In the last week of October 1988, ninety-three members of ten focus groups demonstrated the power of the Horton narrative to elicit racially based fear. "If you saw an ad on prison furloughs with scenes in a prison," these voters were asked, "remember as best you can" the "race or ethnic identity" of the "people you saw in the ad. . . ." Of those who did recall the ad, nearly 60 percent (59.9 percent, 43 individuals) reported that most of the men were black. In fact, only two of the "prisoners" are identifiably black. One of them is the only one in the ad to ever look directly into the camera.

When asked to write out everything "you know about William Horton," all but five of the focus group respondents included the fact that Horton is black in their description. All but twelve wrote that the woman raped was white. One-third of the respondents indicated Horton's race twice in their descriptions. And one focus group respondent referred to Horton throughout his description as "this Black Man." Twenty-eight percent of those in the focus groups indicated that he had committed murder while on furlough. . . .

All narrative capitalizes on the human capacity and disposition to construct stories. A compelling narrative such as the Horton saga controls our interpretation of data by offering a plausible, internally coherent story that resonates with the audience while accounting causally for otherwise discordant or fragmentary information.

When news and ads trace the trauma and drama of a kidnapping and rape by a convicted murderer on furlough, the repetition and the story structure give it added power in memory. Visceral, visual identifications and appositions are better able to be retrieved than statistical abstractions. Repeatedly aired oppositional material carries an additional power. Material aired again and again is more likely to stay fresh in our minds. The same is true for attacks.

Cognitive accessibility is upped by those message traits that characterize the Republicans' use of Horton: the dramatic, the personally relevant, the frequently repeated topic or claim—the menacing mug shot, circling convicts, empathic victims—and seemingly uncaring perpetrator—the Massachusetts governor.

When it came to William Horton, our quirks as consumers of political information worked for the Republicans and against the Democrats. In our psychic equations, something nasty has greater power and influence than something nice. When evaluating "social stimuli," negative informa-

tion carries more weight than positive information. Additionally, negative information seems better able than positive to alter existing impressions and is easier to recall. Televised images that elicit negative emotion result in better recall than those that evoke positive ones. As a result, attacks are better remembered than positive reasons for voting for a candidate. And dissatisfied, disapproving voters are more likely to appear at their polling place than their more satisfied neighbors.

Messages that induce fear dampen our disposition to scrutinize them for gaps in logic. When the message is fear arousing, personal involvement and interest in it minimize systematic evaluation. In the language of cognitive psychology, "[L]arge levels of negative affect such as fear may override cognitive processing."

The Horton story magnifies fear of crime, identifies that fear with Dukakis, and offers a surefire way of alleviating the anxiety—vote for Bush. . . .

The power of the Horton mini-series was magnified as it unfolded soap-opera-like in news and ads; broadcasts that focused on the tale's strategic intent and effect couldn't effectively challenge its typicality. And since statistics don't displace stories nor data, drama, the native language of Dukakis didn't summon persuasive visions of the cops he had put on the street or the murders and rapes that hadn't been committed in a state whose crime rate was down. Abetted by news reports, amplified by Republican ads, assimilated through the cognitive quirks of audiences, William Horton came to incarnate liberalism's failures and voters' fears.

62

LARRY SABATO AND
GLENN SIMPSON

From *Dirty Little Secrets*

Among the many "dirty little secrets" that taint American politics today, Larry Sabato and Glenn Simpson focus here on the technique of push-polling, a new and ugly campaign tactic. While seeming to be a candidate poll seeking voter opinion, the push-poll is really a device to communicate innuendoes that smear the opponent. Sabato and Simpson go on to explain the sophisticated telephone technology that makes techniques like push-polling possible. In case students don't fully grasp the impact of these messages, Sabato and Simpson close with an example—an actual script from Florida's 1994 gubernatorial campaign.

FRANK SORAUF

From Inside Campaign Finance

Since the major reform of political campaign finance law in 1974, many new concepts have entered the vocabulary of money in politics. The 1974 changes gave the Federal Election Commission (FEC) the responsibility to monitor how much money donors give to campaigns. Limits were fixed for individual and group—political action committee (PAC)—contributions. PACs had to be listed with the FEC, and they had to follow guidelines in raising money. All FEC reports were opened for public scrutiny. Political scientist Frank Sorauf is one of the nation's leading authorities on campaign finance. Here he touches on the FEC, PACs, "independent spending," individual donors, and "soft money." Regulating campaign spending, Sorauf concludes, is an imperfect art. Would a new wave of campaign finance reform solve the problem?

AMERICANS HAVE TWO contradictory reactions to the way they finance political campaigns. They remain deeply suspicious of wealth as a campaign resource. The impression persists that campaign money can buy elections and that it can similarly buy public officials. Many Americans believe that monied interests do in fact make the purchases, and commentary about campaign finance repeatedly turns to clichés like "war chests" and "the best Congress money can buy." Yet at the same time, millions of Americans, perhaps as many as 20 million in an election year, contribute willingly, even virtuously, the cash that makes the funding of American campaigns so feared and despised. Thus Americans both nurture and distrust a system of campaign finance, a system that they reject, even scorn, while making it the most broadly based in the world. Perhaps the major result of these paradoxes and anomalies is our collective inability to agree on the reality of American campaign finance and its consequences. It is hard enough to grasp the details of so technical a subject, especially in sorting out the routes and magnitudes of so much campaign money, but it is even harder to pierce the myths that surround the money's impact and consequences.

If there is any constant in the confusions about American campaign finance in the twentieth century, it is in the repeated attempts to reform it to rely on the small sums of ordinary citizens. The history of those

attempts is not a happy one, and yet we have not given up. American optimism about the efficacy of reform, ironically, has run as deep as American distrust of the cash we have tried vainly to reform. So the reformers have persisted throughout the century, their efforts often limited to half-measures and just as often greeted with knowing winks. . . .

In the voluntary, private support for American campaigning, all money originates with individuals, but their money flows in different channels. To take the \$471.2 million raised by all congressional candidates in 1989-90 as an example, \$249.4 million, or 53 percent, went directly from individual contributors to the candidates' committees. Another 32 percent (\$150.6 million) was PAC [political action committee] money raised from individuals; although sponsoring organizations such as corporations or labor unions may pay the overhead expenses of their PACs, they cannot divert funds for such political expenditures from their assets or treasuries. Another sliver, \$4.3 million or 1 percent, came in contributions from party committees. The candidates themselves contributed \$37.9 million (8 percent) to their campaigns in loans and cash contributions. These four main sources make up only 94 percent of the \$471.2 million the candidates raised; loans from other sources and interest earned on money in the campaign treasury accounted for most of the remaining 6 percent. . . .

Money from individuals feeds the expenditure totals of the campaign in two additional ways. First, either an individual or a group (PACs or other groups) may make expenditures in a campaign to urge the election or defeat of a candidate, provided that they are made without the cooperation or knowledge of the candidate they aim to help. These "independent" expenditures totaled \$4.7 million in the 1990 congressional campaigns, virtually all of that in PAC funds and thus ultimately received as individual contributions. Second, party committees may spend "on behalf of" candidates; specialists often refer to these sums as "coordinated" expenditures because they may indeed be made with the full knowledge of the candidates who benefit. In 1990 they came to \$19.3 million, a figure four and a half times greater than the sum the party committees spent in direct dollar contributions to candidates. . . .

As for PACs, there is no limit on aggregate contributions in a year or a cycle—none comparable to the \$25,000 per annum limit on individuals. The largest PACs can and do give millions in an election cycle to candidates for the Congress. The writers of the FECA amendments in 1974 worried largely about individual fat cats. With no aggregate limits to restrain them, PACs some time ago broke the million-dollar barrier, and in the 1990 campaign 21 different PACs gave a million dollars or more

to candidates for the Congress. The Realtors Political Action Committee topped the list with total contributions of \$3,094,228. . . .

That there should be these four sources of money for congressional campaigns—individuals, PACs, parties, and the candidates themselves—is neither intrinsic to the business of campaigning nor inherent in the ways of American politics. The four of them are simply the creation of the 1974 amendments to the Federal Elections Campaign Act. So too are all the statutory limits to their affluence and generosity. However important and confining, or even wise, they may be, neither the sources of the money nor the limits on them are "natural" or inevitable. They result from congressional decisions.

In defining the system of 1974, Congress created one in harmony with contemporary American politics. It was to be candidate-centered: it dealt with money going to candidates, money spent by candidates, and money spent to support or oppose candidates. . . . With the major exception of individuals making contributions, all of the other contributors, recipients, and spenders of money in the campaign were compelled to report their transactions in painful detail to the Federal Election Commission. . . .

Nothing symbolizes the post-1974 regime in campaign finance more vividly than political action committees. They dominate the media-born images of campaign funding and embody most of the public fears about a campaign finance that relies on voluntary private largesse. For some political activists they represent both the opportunities and the fruits of collective action under the new regime. They are, in short, its most conspicuous icons.

In passing the critical amendments to the FECA in 1974 the Congress did not intend to empower organized giving or fund-raising. It wanted primarily to end the power of the individual fat cats in presidential and congressional politics. In their place the reformers clearly hoped for, perhaps even anticipated, a system of campaign finance of almost naive simplicity and pristine motives: a flood of small individual contributions surging up from the political grass roots of the nation. That hope died quickly, a victim of the unplanned incentives for collective action in the new FECA and an irresistible move to group-based organization in all of American politics. The number of PACs multiplied; and less visibly, candidates, especially the incumbents, also discovered the power of organization, most notably in the revival of legislative party organizations. Brokers emerged anew to organize individual contributions in an increasingly national marketplace. So, more or less simultaneously, both contributors

and candidates rediscovered one of the immutable laws of political action: organized, aggregated activity achieves more political goals more effectively.

With the instruments of political organization increasingly available, American politics entered an age of concerted action—whether in neighborhood action groups, in a flourishing Washington representation, or in the funding of campaigns. A heightened pluralism came to all of American politics, but it came to campaign finance almost for the first time in the 1970s and 1980s. With it came all the questions of the consequences of organized politics. At least as long ago as James Madison's authorship of the 10th and 51st papers of *The Federalist*, the notion of organized factions and their ability to exert countervailing limits on each other has been central to the American political tradition. Madison and his followers introduce a great paradox: that in organization there is both strength and weakness. Organization leads to a flourishing, if somewhat disorderly, representation of interests, but in the strivings of these organizations to affect the making of policy, they check, oppose, and offset, however fortuitously, the aims and influence of each other. The ultimate result, the pluralists maintain, is to prevent dangerous concentrations of political influence. The paradox within the paradox is that the greater the number of organizations and the greater their particular strength, the greater the limiting and countervailing consequences of their political activity. . . .

PACs that operate in federal elections—campaigns for the two houses of the Congress and campaigns for president—are closely regulated by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974. It requires that all PACs register with the FEC and report their finances and political activity to it periodically. PACs that meet the statute's standards for a "multicandidate committee"—raising money from at least 50 donors and spending it on at least five candidates for federal office—may contribute \$5,000 per candidate per election. Virtually all PACs so qualify, else they would be bound to the individual contribution limit of \$1,000. The statutes also decide from whom PACs may solicit funds. Corporate PACs, for example, are free to solicit stockholders and management personnel, and labor PACs may solicit only their members; each may solicit the other's clientele under limited circumstances, but they rarely do. . . .

Of all of the attempts to breach the regulatory structures in post-1974 campaign finance, none has been more publicized, even more notorious, than the raising of soft money. A term of epic imprecision, it most usefully refers to money raised outside of the restrictions of federal law (and often to circumvent those restrictions) with the intention, nonetheless, of influencing the outcome of a federal election, directly or indirectly.

That definition, however, omits the agent or actor, and it is often the agent, the recruiter of the soft money, who is the point of contention. The agents are candidates, even presidential candidates, or PACs or party committees, themselves subject to the limits and requirements of the FECA. Hard money, on the contrary, is money that meets all of the litmus tests of the FECA and is thus available for spending in the campaigns governed by the FECA.

It is a capacious definition—the jargon of campaign finance is no more exact than that of the rest of American politics—and one most easily grasps it by illustration. Suppose that the officers of a large corporation, knowing that direct corporate contributions violate federal law, give \$50,000 to the Republican state committee in California, where such contributions are legal, with the hope that by strengthening the party they may help the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate to victory. Soft money? Perhaps, but probably not: both a purposeful agent and a plan for the money's federal impact are missing. But had the money been steered to California by the National Republican Senatorial Committee, even kept in its soft-money accounts, and then allocated to California as a part of a soft-money campaign to build party organization and improve Republican chances of recapturing the Senate, the case is classic. The difference, of course, is an agent with a purpose, and so we return once more to the issue of intermediaries and brokers, if in a somewhat altered guise. . . .

The conventional wisdom is right at last: the regulatory vessel is in fact leaking. Important activity and individuals escape its requirements for reporting, and money flows outside of its controls in swelling torrents. One need only tick off the specifics: bundling, soft money, brokers, independent spending, fund-raisers netting six-figure totals in America's urban centers. However one may wish to describe the structural flaws—as "leaks" or "loopholes"—the integrity of the post-1974 regulatory structure is at grave risk.

60

LANI GUINIER

From *The Tyranny of the Majority*

Law professor Lani Guinier was withdrawn from consideration for the position of assistant attorney general for civil rights in the Justice Department, early in the Clinton administration, because of the storm of controversy over

THE DEBATE: SHOULD CAMPAIGN FINANCE BE REFORMED?

Running for office is expensive: It costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to run a competitive House campaign, several million for a Senate race (in the 1998 New York Senate contest between incumbent Alfonse D'Amato and successful challenger Charles Schumer, the candidates together spent more than \$40 million). And every election season, it seems, ends with a call to somehow control the "money chase" that forces candidates to spend more and more time raising money. Despite increasing public concern over campaign finance, Congress has not enacted any major reforms since 1974.

Norman Ornstein argues that the political conditions are ripe for some sensible changes in the campaign finance law. In particular, he notes that congressional Republicans are facing the possible loss of their House and Senate majorities in 2000, and are thus more eager to embrace a reform agenda. At the same time, members of Congress are increasingly frustrated, he asserts, by "independent campaigns" run by the outside groups and by political parties; in particular, he is critical of enormous "soft-money" expenditures. He proposes a ban on soft money, an increase in individual contribution limits, enhanced disclosure, and a tax credit to encourage small contributions. In his view, these reforms would produce a "healthier and better political system."

Peggy Ellis, on the other hand, opposes further efforts to regulate campaign finance. In her opinion, campaign spending is a form of free speech that ought to be minimally regulated, if at all. She takes particular issue with what she calls the "myths" that make up the campaign finance reform debate. Ellis refutes claims that wealthy contributors alone have access to members of Congress, that reform will make the electoral process more open and competitive, and that elections cost too much. Moreover, she maintains that voters aren't really clamoring for more reform. She proposes eliminating contribution limits, and providing for instant disclosure.

“Five-Point Reform Proposal Would Fix Campaign System”

NORMAN ORNSTEIN

Call me Pollyanna, but I'm feeling bullish about campaign finance reform this Congress. Okay, I'm not reserving my seat at the signing ceremony quite yet, but there are several positive signs out there [as of March 1999].

One—a very small one—is that Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), the unalterable opponent last year of any campaign finance reform, has hinted at alterability. McConnell isn't sitting down at the negotiating table, exactly, but he has said that some reform, notably a soft-money/hard-money trade-off, is “worth discussing.”

If that were all, then you could call me crazy instead of Pollyanna. But I believe McConnell's modest statement reflects a broader political dynamic out there among Congressional Republicans: On this issue, they are sick of defending the indefensible.

The last election, of course, was an embarrassing one for the GOP; the hopes of big gains in both houses, encouraged by historical trends, were dashed. Since then, things have gone from bad to worse. The public trusts President Clinton and the Democrats more than the Republicans on every significant issue, including, incredibly, taxes. In 2000, Republicans have 19 Senate seats at risk, many with vulnerable incumbents in reform-oriented states. Do Republican Senators like Rick Santorum (Pa.), Spencer Abraham (Mich.), Rod Grams (Minn.), Mike DeWine (Ohio), Slade Gorton (Wash.) and John Ashcroft (Mo.) really want to go out to the country next year saddled with the position that they are against any reform?

I think not. And other Republican Senators, like Chuck Hagel (Neb.), John Warner (Va.) and George Voinovich (Ohio), have signaled a willingness to consider alternatives. Add to that the commitment voiced by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to bring up campaign finance reform (albeit without any commitment as to when) and the dynamic is different from 1998.

There is more. After the experiences of 1996 and 1998, more and more Members are concerned about the explosion of outside campaigning, including some of the “independent” campaigns run by the parties. Candidates, many have told me, are losing control of their own campaigns, and that is profoundly discomfiting to them.

One reason they are losing control of their own campaigns is the increased difficulty of raising the money necessary to run an effective House or Senate campaign. And a major reason for that is the contribution limits. Democrats and Republicans are converging on an agreement that the quarter-century-old \$1,000 contribution limit is obsolete—that it needs to be adjusted at minimum to take into account inflation and indexed for the future.

This is the key to a new broad-based bipartisan compromise on campaign reform—a reform plan that would let Republicans and Democrats declare victory. Here it is, a four-course meal, with a fifth element for dessert. This plan would reduce the corrupting role of unlimited contributions, provide better opportunities for all candidates to get their messages across, provide necessary accountability of political campaigners to voters and expand the base and role of small donors.

1. Increase Individual Contribution Limits.

Frankly, if I had my way, I would raise the limit on what donors can give to \$5,000 per candidate per election, to reduce the amount of time candidates spend raising money and to give candidates opportunities to compete against wealthy opponents bankrolling their own campaigns.

But the realistic way to go here is to raise the limit to \$3,000, which merely adjusts the \$1,000 limit for 25 years of inflation, and index it for the future. Some leftist reformers will scream at any increase in the limits—indeed, some extremists want to reduce the limits to \$100. They are wrong.

2. End Soft Money and Increase Limits on Hard-Money Contributions to Parties.

In an ideal world, we would eliminate soft money altogether. The trend in state-based reforms suggests that will happen. But in practical terms, it is not likely that a bipartisan reform achieving 60 votes in the Senate can do more than ban federal soft money and block any transfers of state soft money to other states or to the federal level.

But any soft-money ban must be accompanied by reform of the hard-money limits. Currently, an individual can give a total of \$25,000 per year in hard-money contributions, with a sub-limit of \$20,000 of that to the parties. In other words, an individual could give \$5,000 to candidates (up to \$1,000 each) and \$20,000 to a party or parties; or give \$15,000 to candidates and \$10,000 to parties; or give \$25,000 to candidates and no hard dollars to parties. That has worked because donors can now give close to the maximum to candidates and still give lots more to the parties in unlimited soft dollars.

But if we end soft money without changing the limits there will be

no money for parties. The parties would have to vie with their own candidates for a limited supply of money, in a destructive competition, and the parties would lose.

The solution is simple: Create separate \$25,000 limits for yearly individual contributions to candidates and to parties, and index for the future.

3. Bring Disclosure to Electioneering Masquerading as Sham Issue Advocacy.

A bipartisan reform package should include the bipartisan Snowe-Jeffords amendment that was adopted by the Senate last year, a limited, restrained, reasonable and constitutional way to provide a legal framework for clear campaigning communications close to an election that are now wholly unregulated and undisclosed. Snowe-Jeffords focused on broadcast ads of \$10,000 or more occurring within 60 days of an election; it would ban financing of these campaign ads from corporations and labor unions (in keeping with legislative and court traditions banning them from direct involvement in campaigns) and require disclosure of larger contributions for these electioneering campaigns. There is room for compromise on Snowe-Jeffords.

4. Bring Small Donors Back to Politics with a Tax Credit for Small Contributions.

We once had a tax credit; it was removed with tax reform in 1986. After its demise, small contributions (defined as \$200 or less) began a steady decline. The more people give to campaigns, the more people have some stake in the political process. No one could reasonably argue that contributions of \$100 or \$200 are corrupting. The best way is to enact a 100 percent tax credit for Congressional contributions up to \$100. This should not be a windfall for regular and large donors, so give it an income threshold, which will also reduce the cost to the Treasury. The experiences of states like Minnesota that have tax credits for contributions to state and local candidates say that this step will make a real difference.

So that is a simple four-point plan. Now here is a fifth point to reinforce and enhance the role of small donors. The tax credit is an incentive for donors to give, but not for candidates to spend time and effort soliciting money from the little guys. The economics of fundraising have changed in recent years in bad ways. I've had scores of Members and candidates say things like, "I'd love to put on a \$25-a-person barbecue. It would involve lots of people, energize them, give me a chance to do some retail campaigning. I'd do it if I could break even. But when I calculate the costs of reaching the thousands of people to invite, and putting on the event, it is a money loser." Most lawmakers fall back on

the easy course of the \$500-a-head cocktail reception for lobbyists at the Capitol Hill Club or the National Democratic Club.

We need an incentive for candidates to use their time and efforts reaching out to small donors. Here it is. Candidates who raise over a threshold amount in small contributions—say, \$25,000 in contributions of \$100 or less—would become eligible for a voucher program. For each additional \$1,000 they raised in small contributions, they would get a \$500 voucher good for purchase of television time at any broadcast station. The broadcast stations in turn could apply the vouchers for a 50-percent credit on their federal tax returns.

On the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters, which I co-chaired with [network president] Leslie Moonves of CBS, broadcasters pledged that if Congress passed significant campaign reform, they would do their part. This is it. They would shoulder half the cost of this plan, and the public the other half. One way to finance the public cost would be through the revenues in the administration budget from user fees on analog broadcast stations. In any event, the costs would be modest.

Not all candidates would become eligible for the vouchers (multimillionaires would not; the Michael Huffington/Al Checchi-type candidates* couldn't raise much from small donors). And the vouchers are a one-for-two match. So, given the overall expenditures on broadcast time in the last couple of cycles, the cost might come to \$100 million or so per year—a small price to pay for bringing small donors back and rewarding candidates who raise the right kind of money.

We would have a healthier and better political system if Congress enacted versions of all five of these ideas. I'll settle for four.

51

“Ten Big Lies About Campaign Finance Reform”

PEGGY ELLIS

1. *The American People Are Clamoring for Campaign Finance Reform.*

Outside of Washington and the political elites, campaign finance reform finishes *at the bottom* of the list of issues people care about (3%). Most voters believe that whatever reforms are passed, politicians will find a

*[These multimillionaire candidates largely self-financed their campaigns.]

way around the new rules (73%). By huge margins, voters are less likely to vote for their Member of Congress if they vote for reforms that are unconstitutional (88%), make it easier for them to get re-elected (71%), make it more difficult for citizens' groups to inform voters of candidates' voting records (80%) or increase the relative power of the media (69%) (Tarrance Group, June 1997).

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), the "Darth Vader of campaign finance reform," won re-election last year [1996] with a 160,000 vote margin—without the endorsements of the two largest newspapers because of his stance on "reform" and with the maximum contributions allowed by law from the tobacco companies. Rep. Linda Smith (R-WA) won her first election while being hugely outspent by the incumbent. She then became the darling of campaign finance reformers and almost lost.

2. Only Wealthy Special Interests Have Access to Members of Congress.

Poppycock. The first item on all members' calendars is, and will always be, constituents. Members of Congress meet with lobbyists and policy experts all day long and then go vote the way they want to. Further, it is part of every legislative aide's job to meet with all sides to best prepare their boss for whatever the issue might be. As Senator Bob Bennett (R-UT) said at a recent hearing, "I'll tell you who has access to me—anyone registered to vote in the state of Utah."

3. Banning Soft Money Is the Only Way to Assure the Scandals of the '96 Presidential Election Don't Happen Again.

The best way to assure the abuses of '96 don't happen again is to punish those who have broken the law. Soft money was banned in the original 1974 rules and the 1976 election was run without soft money. Parties were so strapped for cash that traditional activities such as bumper stickers and get out the vote drives were sharply curtailed. One of the primary purposes of the 1979 Amendments to the Federal Election Act (FECA) was to restore soft money. Traditional party building activities are clearly not what the reformers want to control. It is the issue ads run by the parties—which are the essence of First Amendment protected speech. To eliminate this distortion, eliminate the limits on party contributions to their candidates. It is bizarre that political parties cannot give directly to their candidates as much as they want. No claims can be made of a corrupting relationship between a candidate and their political party. And for those who want to open up the political process and loosen the grip of incumbents, political parties are the one group that will always support a challenger.

4. *You Can Constitutionally Control Issue Advocacy.*

It is often forgotten that the original 1974 Amendments to the Federal Elections Campaign Act, Congress sought to limit issue ads, just as many do now. The Supreme Court overturned these rules. Nothing is more central to the core of what our country was founded on than the ability of private individuals and groups to discuss, criticize and protest their elected officials and those that seek office. A twenty-year string of court decisions reaffirm that free and unencumbered political speech enjoys the highest First Amendment protection and cannot be regulated by the federal government.

5. *Most Issue Ads Are "Thinly Veiled Campaign Ads" and, Therefore, Can and Must Be Regulated by the Federal Election Commission.*

Nothing is more central to the First Amendment than the rights of individuals and groups to participate openly and freely in our nation's political debate. Reformers and misinformed Senators claim that, since issue ads are clearly intended to influence an election, they should be regulated. *Buckley v. Valeo* anticipated this argument: *of course* the Court held that these ads are intended to influence elections, but our First Amendment rights are so central to our political freedom that unless the words "vote for" or "vote against" are used, these ads are issue advocacy and cannot be regulated by the government.

6. *McCain-Feingold Will Open Up the System.*

In fact, [the] McCain-Feingold [bill] could be renamed the Incumbent Protection Act. The stratospheric incumbent re-election rate we have today is a direct result of the 1974 rules. Contribution and spending limits and tighter controls on issue advocacy are blatant incumbent protection. All the distortions in the current system are results of the 1974 rules—the 90% incumbent re-election rate, the explosion of issue advocacy and soft money and the increase of millionaires in office, the amount of time candidates have to spend raising money, the increase in the relative power of the media and celebrities. More of the same is not the answer.

7. *Buckley Was a 5-to-4 Decision and "a Close Call," Vulnerable to Future Court Tests.*

On the contrary—we have 20 years of court decisions reaffirming the central findings of the *Buckley* decision. In the area of issue advocacy alone, in the years since *Buckley* was decided, both the Supreme Court and lower courts have, time and time again, reaffirmed the reasoning and holding of that decision as it pertains to the protection of issue ad-

vocacy. The 126 "constitutional scholars" currently said to endorse McCain-Feingold do not endorse the issue advocacy restrictions at all, only the soft money and spending limits. In fact, the 4th Circuit was so disturbed by the FEC's continual attempts to redraw the lines defining issue advocacy that they demanded in April that the FEC pay Christian Action Network's court costs.

8. Campaign Costs Are Spiraling Out of Control.

This "explosion" is outside of candidate spending. Candidate spending was virtually flat between 1994 and 1996 with an explosion of issue ads outside of the campaigns themselves. The answer, however, is not to trample the First Amendment rights of private individuals, but to lift the contribution limits on parties and candidates. Let the money spent on many of the issue ads flow directly to the candidates. As for the anger many Members have at private groups expressing their views and—absolutely—trying to influence their election—too bad! Politics and political campaigns belong to the people, not to the candidates and certainly not the federal government. The right to seek to persuade fellow citizens at election time is as fundamental as the right to vote itself.

9. Obscene Amounts of Money Are Spent in Political Campaigns.

Congressional candidates spent approximately \$740 million dollars during the last congressional race. This is only slightly higher than the approximately \$720 million spent in the 1994 congressional race. \$700 million is a lot of money—but not when compared to what we spend as a society in other areas. These congressional totals average less than \$4 per eligible voter. If you look at every race in the country, from dogcatcher to president, the amount spent is less than \$10 per eligible voter. As a society, we spend more on potato chips, Barbie dolls, yogurt and a host of other commodities than we do on politics. While many of us may like Barbie dolls and potato chips more than we like politics, only politics has control over every aspect of our lives.

10. We Must Control the Amount of Money Spent in Campaigns Because Candidates and Members of Congress Have to Spend All Their Time Raising Money.

It is the ridiculous \$1,000 contribution limit that has limited the ability of challengers to raise the money they need to mount a successful campaign—and the reason Members of Congress have to spend so much time raising money. The answer is not to control the amount candidates can spend, which would only further entrench incumbents, but to elim-

inate the contribution limits. Let the money flow directly to the candidates and, with almost-instant electronic disclosure, let the voters decide.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In 1976, the Supreme Court ruled that campaign spending is a form of "political speech" protected by the First Amendment. Do you agree? What implications does this have for efforts to control campaign spending?
2. What do you think of the proposal to eliminate contribution limits completely, as long as the amounts were disclosed? Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who took \$100,000—or \$5 million—from a single individual?
3. What should be the goals of campaign finance reform?

tion carries more weight than positive information. Additionally, negative information seems better able than positive to alter existing impressions and is easier to recall. Televised images that elicit negative emotion result in better recall than those that evoke positive ones. As a result, attacks are better remembered than positive reasons for voting for a candidate. And dissatisfied, disapproving voters are more likely to appear at their polling place than their more satisfied neighbors.

Messages that induce fear dampen our disposition to scrutinize them for gaps in logic. When the message is fear arousing, personal involvement and interest in it minimize systematic evaluation. In the language of cognitive psychology, “[L]arge levels of negative affect such as fear may override cognitive processing.”

The Horton story magnifies fear of crime, identifies that fear with Dukakis, and offers a surefire way of alleviating the anxiety—vote for Bush. . . .

The power of the Horton mini-series was magnified as it unfolded soap-opera-like in news and ads; broadcasts that focused on the tale’s strategic intent and effect couldn’t effectively challenge its typicality. And since statistics don’t displace stories nor data, drama, the native language of Dukakis didn’t summon persuasive visions of the cops he had put on the street or the murders and rapes that hadn’t been committed in a state whose crime rate was down. Abetted by news reports, amplified by Republican ads, assimilated through the cognitive quirks of audiences, William Horton came to incarnate liberalism’s failures and voters’ fears.

62

LARRY SABATO AND GLENN SIMPSON

From *Dirty Little Secrets*

Among the many “dirty little secrets” that taint American politics today, Larry Sabato and Glenn Simpson focus here on the technique of push-polling, a new and ugly campaign tactic. While seeming to be a candidate poll seeking voter opinion, the push-poll is really a device to communicate innuendoes that smear the opponent. Sabato and Simpson go on to explain the sophisticated telephone technology that makes techniques like push-polling possible. In case students don’t fully grasp the impact of these messages, Sabato and Simpson close with an example—an actual script from Florida’s 1994 gubernatorial campaign.

Oh, the telephone is now a very evil technique.

—*Republican pollster Frank Luntz, November 1994*

The one thing I see repeatedly is the total abuse of the phone.

It's really running rampant and getting worse.

—*Democratic consultant Joe Trippi, August 1995*

PERKS, AND THE ABUSE OF THEM, are both as old as Congress, although the nature of the abuse has evolved considerably. But both major political parties make use of new technology, too, and not just in developing sophisticated direct-mail operations. Computerized telephone banks, made available to the candidates by the professional beneficiaries of big-money politics—the for-hire campaign consultants—have begun to make their mark. While consultants have a separate profit motive, they share with candidates a steely determination to do whatever it takes to win.

During every campaign season, a great deal of attention is properly devoted to condemning misleading television advertisements and nasty direct-mail letters. But “push-polling” has largely been ignored, even though it has become the rage in American campaigns, to the detriment of both civility and the truth. It was a factor most recently in Iowa during the 1996 Republican Caucus, when candidate Steve Forbes accused the Bob Dole campaign of tactics akin to those discussed [here]. Unless aggressive action is taken, this difficult-to-catch form of political sleaze threatens to drag our already debased electioneering even lower.

The push-poll operates under the guise of legitimate survey research to spread lies, rumors, and innuendo about candidates. Hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of voters were telephoned and push-pollled during the 1994 elections. This effort dramatically increased the degree of negativity in American politics. Many voters and observers were disgusted and enraged by the tactic, but sleaze telephoning can work efficiently and effectively—and so, unless exposed and checked, it is bound to become standard ammunition in campaign arsenals across the United States. . . .

... *A push-poll is a survey instrument containing questions which attempt to change the opinion of contacted voters, generally by divulging negative information about the opponent which is designed to push the voter away from him or her and pull the voter toward the candidate paying for the polling.* In other words, push-polling is *campaigning under the guise of research.* This operational definition parallels the push-poll used by businesses,

“sugging”—selling under the guise of a telephone research poll products or publications. But the push-poll is actually several forms of public opinion surveying and targeted voter contact, some legitimate and others dismaying.

The most common and defensible type is an adjunct to “opposition research,” a campaigner’s effort to learn about the opponents’ record and discover what might reduce public support for them. Commonly, a pollster working for a candidate will pre-test positive and negative campaign themes in a random-sample public opinion survey by telephone early in the campaign season. Voters will be asked for their reactions to the virtues and the vices of the major-party candidates, including some blemishes that may not yet be publicly known. For instance, in a standard research push-poll, a respondent (that is, a citizen called by the pollster) is often read a relatively fair, paragraph-long biographical description of each candidate and asked which contender he or she supports. Then additional information is added, question by question, to test the voter’s commitment, and to assess what issues might “push” a voter away from his or her initial choice. For example,

If you learned that [Candidate A] has voted for six tax increases in the state legislature, would this make you more or less likely to support her?

If you learned that [Candidate B] opposes a woman’s right to choose; an abortion, would this make you more or less likely to support him?

Some push-polls give voters several choices for answers: “Would this make you a great deal *more* likely to support him, somewhat *more* likely, somewhat *less* likely, a great deal *less* likely, or would it not make any difference to you?” In this way, a campaign can prepare itself by determining which assaults actually move opinion. Naturally, the candidate wants to know what will work or whether his ammunition is mostly blanks. One well-known national political pollster, Frederick/Schneiders, Inc. (FSI), even advertises its “extensive use” of this type of push-poll in a promotional brochure given to prospective clients: “Every poll is a mini campaign. Respondents are exposed to candidate information during a poll the same way they will be during the campaign. By testing which set of information ‘stimuli’ best produces a maximum vote for the client, FSI polls provide a clear picture of where a race is going and how to get there, not just where it stands today.”

The information contained in research-oriented push-polls is fact-based and essentially true (even if presented in a blunt and exaggerated partisan style). The primary goal of this type of push-poll is to obtain the

unbiased views of voters, not necessarily to turn the respondents off to the opponent. The respondents are "pushed" to determine what the campaign may need to do to change the image of the opponent, and the negative issues being tested in the survey will probably be ones easily transferable to public, on-the-record attacks made during the campaign (using television advertising, direct mail, or simple stump speeches) . . .

But even this "legitimate" manifestation of push-polling can be troubling. Such a survey may reach 400 to 1,500 respondents in a relatively small geographic area (say, a compact congressional district), and negative personal information about a freely discussed candidate with this many people can quickly become fodder for a districtwide gossip mill. Professional pollsters may object to this characterization. If a survey asks questions about issues or character that portray both candidates in a negative light, they reason that the research poll does no harm. However, they evaluate questions on the basis of their professional perspective—here, the goal is questionnaire balance and unbiased survey results. The trouble is that even balanced surveys yielding unbiased responses will disseminate negative information. This adversely affects the tenor and character of the campaign, and adds to the rampant negativism of modern politics.

Such information is still more worrisome if it is exaggerated or outright false, as is frequently the case with a second type of push-poll, the so-called agenda-driven survey, also known as deliberative polling. Here the pollster is still conducting a random-sample telephone survey with a representative group of voters, but the goal has changed. The agenda is to produce a favorable horse race result for the client-candidate, so that potential contributors and the press can be apprised of the candidate's "impending victory." The technique does not always work, but donors want to give hard-earned dollars to a likely winner, and the news media love to publish and air horse race polls. With a little luck, such a poll could create a bandwagon effect for the leading candidate. A good example of this "agenda-driven" push-poll can be found in Missouri's Fifth Congressional District race in 1994. A loaded survey taken in September by Republican pollster Frank Luntz for GOP nominee Ron Freeman produced an eight percentage point lead for Freeman over Democratic nominee Karen McCarthy for an open seat. Yet on election day McCarthy won easily (56.6 percent to 43.4 percent), despite the overall GOP tide. There may actually be little or no real "bandwagon effect," but politicians and consultants *believe* there is such a thing and strive to create it by looking like a winner.

They do so by providing the respondents with loads of derogatory

40

background on the opponent. Before respondents are asked how they will vote, they may be read biographical sketches heavily biased against the opponent. The client may be portrayed as Mother Teresa and the opponent painted as one step away from the sheriff's manacles. Sometimes the poll asks a series of questions incorporating damaging assertions about the opponent. Often the worst is saved for last, culminating in the classic horse race question, "If the election were held today, would you vote for [Candidate A] or [Candidate B]?" Not surprisingly, at this point a sizable plurality tends to favor the unsullied client. The "good news" numbers are triumphantly released, with no mention of the poll format or non-horse race questions. And glibble contributors open their wallets; undiscerning journalists, usually the more inexperienced press persons, write the desired headlines; and the hundreds of voter-respondents may talk to family and friends about the shocking (though perhaps false) information they have learned about a prominent politician. Thus, the ripple effects can be far-reaching. . . .

The first two types of push-polls seem almost harmless when compared with the third form, called "negative persuasive" or "advocacy phoning." This push-poll is not really a poll at all, but a form of targeted voter contact and canvassing, since no random sample of the population is selected. Instead, the emphasis is on volume: as many voters in a target population as possible (union members, gun owners, conservative Christians, or whatever) are contacted with a highly negative message that is short—even a minute or less—and asks no demographical background information on the respondents. First, respondents are asked which candidate they favor. If the client-candidate is chosen, the respondent is thanked and placed on the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) list for election day. But if the respondent picks the opponent or says she is undecided, then a torrent of negativity is unleashed: "Would you still support this if you learned that he [is a tax-evader, a baby-killer, or shoots newborn puppies for sport]?" As one frank push-pollster put it on background, "What you're trying to do is mobilize voters *against* a candidate. . . . You're taking a specific audience and literally telling them why they shouldn't be voting for somebody."

The target audience can be voters in swing districts, or even voters in the opponent's areas of greatest strength. In both cases, push-pollsters are attempting to persuade voters that the opponent is not worthy of their backing and thereby *suppressing* his turnout. This "suppression phoning" is the reverse of a form of GOTV called "positive persuasive phoning," which delivers favorable information about the candidate-client to any

respondent who is undecided. Obviously, this positive phoning is far preferable ethically to the negative variety, but this once-dominant kind of GOTV is being supplanted in many areas by attack push-polling. But like GOTV, it is done largely in the final weeks or days of a campaign—when the rush of events makes it least likely to be detected or exposed by the opposition or the press. Naturally, the harshest and most untruthful messages are saved for election eve or the weekend prior to Election Day, according to several telephone-bank consultants we interviewed. And, of course, the beauty of this ugly technique is stealth. Unless, by some wild circumstance, a respondent has his phone fitted with a recording device and has the presence of mind to turn on the tape as the interview begins, or someone on the inside talks, there is no way to find fingerprints and fix blame. . . .

The scale and telephone technology of push-polling are new; the concept itself, and the depths to which it can descend, are unfortunately not. It will surprise few to learn that Richard Nixon, whose lack of an ethical compass eventually resulted in his presidency's destruction, was one of push-polling's pioneers. In his very first campaign, a successful 1946 run for the U.S. House against Democratic incumbent Jerry Voorhis, Democratic voters throughout his district reported receiving telephone calls that began, "This is a friend of yours, but I can't tell you who I am. Did you know that Jerry Voorhis is a Communist?" at which point the caller hung up. While no firsthand evidence was produced to link the Nixon campaign directly with the calls, at least one individual has come forward admitting that she worked for Nixon at \$9 a day, in a telephone-bank room where the attack calls were made. The technique, according to distinguished Nixon biographer Stephen E. Ambrose, was well-suited to the "vicious, snarling . . . dirty" Nixon campaign, which "was full of half-truths, full lies, and innuendoes, hurled at such a pace that Voorhis could never catch up with them."

Nixon was not alone in his use of gutter tactics, of course, but for decades this kind of negativity was regularly and roundly condemned by the press and most political professionals. It may be a commentary on our times that this is no longer so. In fact, candidates, parties, and consultants sometimes brag openly about their excursions into sleaze, once the campaign is over. In 1986, for example, the Democrats and their allies in the labor unions undertook massive negative persuasive phoning just before the midterm congressional elections that saw a Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate restored after six years of GOP rule. The telephone message centered upon the Reagan administration's supposed plans to

undermine and reduce funding for Social Security—a highly suspect allegation that nonetheless appeared to do the trick, according to strategists for both parties. This episode has been repeatedly cited by Democrats as a clever tactic to employ in the years since. Perhaps not incidentally, the Social Security push-poll against R-republicans has continued to be a mainstay of Democratic "outreach" to senior citizens until the present day. Many of the 1994 R-republican congressional candidates we interviewed complained about it.

Over a hundred political consulting firms specializing in persuasive phoning have sprung up over the past two decades. For example, 154 telephone firms offering political "direct contact" services were listed by *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, a well-known trade journal for consultants and aspiring officeholders, in a publication released in February 1995. The new technology of computer-aided telephoning and target selection has made the process of political and commercial marketing by phone vastly easier and more efficient. A single operator can make 80 to 100 completed calls with a short message *each evening hour*, at a cost (depending on message length and company) of \$0.45 to \$1.30 per call. In other words, a quarter million targeted calls can be made for \$112,000 to \$325,000—arguably a solid investment for a multimillion-dollar statewide campaign that is probably spending many times that on diffuse television advertising. . . .

The proliferation of telephone marketing technology and the firms that sell it not only fills a campaign need but creates one. The firms' aggressive entrepreneurs—another variety of the ubiquitous political consultants that specialize in attack politics—advertise the technology's availability, and also ignite the latent fear in every campaign manager that the other side may be employing the technique already. (This same psychology once fueled the superpowers' arms race.)

Take Mac Hansbrough, the pleasant and forthcoming president of Washington, D.C.-based National Telecommunications Services, whose clients have included the Democratic National Committee, abortion-rights groups, and various Democratic candidates. Hansbrough wrote a remarkably candid 1992 article, "Dial N for Negative," in *Campaigns and Elections*. Calling negative phoning "the single most important and cost-effective communications tool a campaign can employ" and predicting its widespread use in the 1990s, Hansbrough correctly suggested that the technique would "take its place beside negative television, radio, and direct mail as a necessary tool in the . . . consultant's arsenal." And he cited the "lack of spill-over" as one vital reason why:

One can deliver different messages to multiple groups of voters with little chance that one group will receive the other's message or that the larger constituency of uncalled voters will receive any of the messages. This is a major advantage when controversial issues are being discussed, and it is an advantage that TV and radio cannot offer. . . .

Negative phoning leaves few footprints. TV and radio ads can be heard by anyone and are often reported in the newspaper. Direct mail is available to find its way into anyone's hands and has the lasting effect that goes with all printed matter. Phone calls, of course, are verbal. Scripts are tightly controlled and rarely get out to the press, general public, or opponents. Phone calls are the true communications stealth technology of the future.

In follow-up interviews, Hansbrough told us that in his experience, negative phoning was most likely to occur in a close campaign, where a desperate candidate is hard-pressed and increasingly willing to do whatever it takes to win: "You use a negative approach only when you have to, and in my opinion, you only have to when you are very sure or reasonably sure that you may be losing the election." Even in these cases, though, candidates—fearing a backlash or a damaging news story—usually desire a buffer between their campaigns and the telephoning. So the sponsorship is passed to the national or state party committee, or a friendly allied group (say, a labor union for a Democratic nominee or a conservative organization for a R-republican nominee). In some cases, a separate front vehicle is actually invented, such as "Citizens for Tax Fairness" or a neutral-sounding polling research company. (See the negative persuasion phoning scripts . . . which have been used in a recent campaign by Hansbrough clients.) However, Hansbrough stressed that whatever the sponsorship, the campaign controls the message, and the final scripting normally is approved by it. Hansbrough freely admits that most of the calling occurs at the election's last minute, and that there is much hand-wringing about the practice in many campaigns. But if the race is tight enough, the doubts are usually resolved *in favor* of negative phoning. Adds Hansbrough: "There's another good reason for doing it late: . . . negative campaigning is controversial [so] don't stir it up until you have to," or until it is likely the press will not pick up on the tactic until the election is over.

Two examples of these negative persuasion phoning scripts are reproduced [here]. These scripts were used by the campaign of Florida Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles, a Hansbrough client, in his successful 1994 reelection bid against R-republican Jeb Bush, son of former President George Bush. After the election, R-republicans claimed that Chiles's narrow victory (65,000 votes out of 4.2 million cast) was due to these negative

telephone scripts, read to tens of thousands of Floridians shortly before the election.

NEGATIVE PERSUASION PHONING: TWO EXAMPLES

SCRIPT 1

Hello, this is [interviewer's name] calling on behalf of the Florida Association of Senior Citizens. We are calling to let you know that [R-republican nominee for governor] Jeb Bush is no friend of seniors. Bush's running mate has advocated the abolition of Social Security and called Medicare a welfare program that should be cut. We just can't trust Jeb Bush and [lieutenant governor nominee] Tom Feeney. Thank you and have a good day/evening.

SCRIPT 2

Hello, my name is [interviewer's name] calling from the Citizens for Tax Fairness. I am calling to remind you that unlike thousands of your fellow citizens, Jeb Bush failed to pay local and state taxes and he has profited at the taxpayers' expense from business deals involving failed savings and loan properties. Mr. Bush doesn't play by the same rules like the rest of us and we want to make sure you are aware of this before you cast your vote on Tuesday. Thank you and have a good day/evening.

Source: Scripts were provided by Mac Hansbrough. The campaigns using them were not identified by Hansbrough. But a year after the November 1994 election, these scripts became the center of controversy in Florida, where Republicans claimed they unfairly attacked Jeb Bush and helped to reelect Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles.

Negative phoning is just the latest, and perhaps nastiest, extension of the harsh tone of modern American politics. The technique "is effective because voters are much more prepared today to believe negative things about candidates than they once were. Negative TV ads, radio, direct mail, and news coverage have really paved the way" for negative phoning,

42

asserts Hansbrough. Sleaze and cynicism do indeed feast at each other's table, as push-polling is proving anew.

63

STEPHEN ANSOLABEHHERE AND SHANTO IYENGAR

From *Going Negative*

The weakening of political parties, growing voter cynicism, and negative campaign advertising: Political scientists Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar interrelate these complex developments in American politics. Illustrating their thesis with some memorable election campaign attack ads, the authors contend that a vicious cycle has developed. Middle-of-the-road, independent-minded voters are increasingly alienated by negative campaigns, with the result that politics becomes more and more the province of those on the ideological extremes.

ONCE UPON A TIME, this country divided itself neatly along party lines. Most people voted; those who did not tended to be poorer, less well-educated, and more apathetic, but still party loyal. The line between participants and nonparticipants was a fault line of sorts, but it was not terribly worrisome. Civic duty ideally would involve everyone, but, even falling short of the ideal, we were at least expressing our national will in our elections. Television has changed all that. Now, we are split by a new division: between loyalists and apathetics. On the one hand, media propaganda can often shore up loyalists to vote for their traditional party; on the other hand, that same propaganda is increasingly peeling off a band of citizens who turn from independence to apathy, even antipathy, toward our political institutions.

Pollsters and political scientists first noticed this new fault line in 1964. The number of people who proclaimed themselves independent of traditional party labels rose sharply in the mid-1960s. At the same time, candidates embraced television as a new means of independent communication with the voters. Politicians no longer needed the legions of party workers to get their messages across; they could effectively establish personal connections with their constituents using television advertising. In addition, there arose a new class of campaign manager—the media consultant, who typically had worked on Madison Avenue and viewed

interests. The system is skewed, loaded, and unbalanced in favor of a fraction of a minority.

On the other hand, pressure tactics are not remarkably successful in mobilizing general interests. When pressure-group organizations attempt to represent the interests of large numbers of people, they are usually able to reach only a small segment of their constituencies. Only a chemical trace of the fifteen million Negroes in the United States belong to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Only one five hundredths of 1 percent of American women belong to the League of Women Voters, only one sixteen hundredths of 1 percent of the consumers belong to the National Consumers' League, and only 6 percent of American automobile drivers belong to the American Automobile Association, while about 15 percent of the veterans belong to the American Legion.

The competing claims of pressure groups and political parties for the loyalty of the American public revolve about the difference between the results likely to be achieved by small-scale and large-scale political organization. Inevitably, the outcome of pressure politics and party politics will be vastly different. ■



American Politics Today

One of the most significant changes in the role of interest groups in American politics in recent decades has come in the area of campaign funding. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 put strict limits on the amount of money that individuals could contribute to federal campaigns, but it also opened up new opportunities for political action committees (or PACs) to become involved in campaign finance. Although the campaign act put limits on PAC contributions, these have proven easy to evade or circumvent. PACs are also free to spend money independently on behalf of causes and candidates, as long as they do not coordinate or consult with a candidate or campaign.

The role of PACs in funding political campaigns has raised serious questions. Since most PACs are connected with business organizations, critics of the system worry that candidates and officeholders have become too beholden to corporate interests. Others are concerned that ideological PACs on both the left and the right have contributed to the polarization of American politics.

In this selection, the political scientist Paul S. Herrnson examines the role of interest group and political action committees in American campaign politics.

Questions

1. In what ways might PACs be considered as an asset to democracy? In what ways might they be regarded as a detriment to democracy?
2. Does Herrnson's description of the role of PACs in modern campaigns support or undermine E. E. Schattschneider's argument (selection 6.1) on the "scope and bias" of the interest group system?

6.2 Interest Groups, PACs, and Campaigns (1998)

Paul S. Herrnson

Elections are the most important connection between citizens and those who represent them in public office. Through elections citizens have the opportunity to express their approval or dissatisfaction with the job performance of individual officeholders or the government in general. Elections also provide the general public with the opportunity to have some input into the direction of public policy. Individual citizens, however, are not the only ones who use the electoral connection to express their views about politics. Businesses, labor unions, professional associations, and a variety of other groups—some of which are at best only loosely organized—also use elections to influence public policy. This chapter presents an overview of the activities of interest groups in federal elections.

From Pulpits to PACs

The potential for significant election-oriented interest group activity exists anywhere that a group can be found or organized. Churches, boardrooms, union halls, condominium association meeting rooms, and even the World Wide Web provide venues in which political organizing commonly occurs. The groups that assemble in these places often provide endorsements, volunteers, financial support, and other campaign assistance to candidates for the House, the Senate, the presidency, and state and local offices.

For most of the twentieth century, interest groups made three kinds of contributions to the election process. One had to do with the recruitment of candidates. Labor unions, civic clubs, and some other groups encouraged potential candidates to run for office and participated in their nomination campaigns. Interest group activity in this aspect of elections was important but was often secondary to that of political parties, which have traditionally played a more central role in candidate recruitment.

Another contribution that interest groups made to the election process was organizational. Labor unions, ethnic clubs, and business concerns provided campaign volunteers, sponsored rallies, endorsed candidates, and helped the candidates disseminate their messages. One of the groups' most important contributions to the campaign was to deliver the votes of their members on election day. Groups that had a large concentrated base strongly identified with and committed to the group's political causes were highly influential in elections. Some groups,

Paul S. Herrnson, "Interest Groups, PACs, and Campaigns," in Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox, *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policy-making in Washington* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), pp. 37–51. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

particularly unions, had enough members and political clout to enable a candidate to secure a party nomination and win the general election.

The final contribution that interest groups made was financial. Corporations, trade associations, unions, and other groups historically have helped finance election campaigns. For much of U.S. political history, many groups have made contributions directly from their own treasuries or organized fund-raising committees and events.

Interest groups continue to participate in these aspects of federal elections, but they have adapted their activities to meet the opportunities and constraints that exist in the current legal, technological, and political environment. The modern political action committee (PAC), for example, emerged during the 1970s as a specialized form of organization that contributes money and other campaign support directly to federal candidates. A PAC can be most easily understood as the election arm of an interest group. In most cases, a business, union, trade association, or some other "parent" group is responsible for establishing a PAC. Yet, for most "ideological" or "nonconnected" PACs, the PAC is the organization itself.

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 (FECA), its amendments, and Federal Election Commission (FEC) rulings are primarily responsible for the rise of PACs as a major force in federal elections. The law prohibits corporations, unions, trade associations, and most other groups from making campaign contributions to federal candidates, but it allows these organizations to set up PACs to collect donations from individuals and distribute them as campaign contributions to federal candidates. PACs are allowed to accept contributions of up to \$5,000 per year from an individual or another PAC. In order to qualify as a PAC an organization must raise money from at least fifty donors and spend it on five or more federal candidates.

The FECA allows PACs to contribute a maximum of \$5,000 per congressional candidate during each phase of the election cycle (primary, general election, and runoff). A PAC can also contribute up to \$5,000 to a candidate for a presidential nomination and give another \$5,000 to any presidential candidate in the general election who opts not to receive federal funds. Nevertheless, the rules governing presidential campaign finance deemphasize the roles of PACs in presidential elections. The public funding provisions for nomination contests provide matching funds for individual but not PAC contributions, thereby encouraging candidates to pursue individual rather than PAC contributions. The public funding provisions for the general election ban presidential candidates who accept federal funds from taking contributions from any sources, including PACs. The fact that every major-party candidate for the presidency between 1976 and 1996 has accepted public funding has encouraged most PACs to focus their efforts on congressional rather than presidential elections.¹

There are other important aspects of federal elections in which some PACs, as well as corporations, unions, and other groups, participate. One is concerned with the financing of party committees and their campaign activities. PACs are al-

¹Candidate-sponsored PACs are the exception to the rule. These committees are frequently used to pay for some of the preliminary activities that politicians conduct before declaring their candidacies for the nomination.

lowed to contribute up to \$15,000 per year to the federal accounts of national party committees. The parties can redistribute these funds as campaign contributions and expenditures made in direct coordination with federal campaigns or, as the result of a recent Supreme Court ruling, as independent expenditures made without the knowledge or consent of individual candidates.² PACs, individuals, and other organized groups can also make unlimited contributions to the soft money or nonfederal accounts that national parties use to help finance their internal operations, party-building activities, voter mobilization efforts, and generic campaign advertisements.³

A second activity is concerned with coordinating the campaign efforts of individuals. Many PAC directors, industry executives, and leaders of other groups work to coordinate the contributions of their colleagues and other big givers. They do this through sponsoring fund-raising events and serving on candidates' fund-raising committees. In some cases, these groups engage in a controversial practice called "bundling," in which a PAC or individual group leader collects contribution checks from individuals and delivers them under one cover to a candidate. Bundling is a highly effective form of contributing because it enables a group to steer more money to a candidate than it can otherwise legally contribute, and it allows both individual givers and groups to gain recognition for their contributions.

Individuals, PACs, and parties can also make unlimited independent expenditures to advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate as long as those expenditures are not coordinated with the candidate's campaign. Corporations, unions, and other groups are prohibited from spending money from their treasuries or operating accounts expressly to advocate voting for or against a particular candidate. Nevertheless a loophole in the law enables them to conduct "issue advocacy" campaigns in which they disseminate information designed to harm or help a candidate (or promote an issue) that does not directly tell people to vote for or against that candidate. Many groups, such as the AFL-CIO, have recently sought to take advantage of this loophole by carrying out issue advocacy campaigns designed to advance a candidate's standing with voters or detract from an opponent's level of support. Finally, these groups can also make unlimited expenditures to communicate with their members.

Pathways to Capitol Hill

Candidate Recruitment Candidate recruitment and selection is an activity that has traditionally been carried out by local party organizations. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, local party bosses handpicked candidates for Congress and other offices. Organized interests did not have a formal role in candidate selection, but business owners, union leaders, and other local elites were sometimes part of the machine. They were often consulted because their support could be instrumental in winning elections.

²See *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission*, U.S. 64 U.S.L. 4663 (1996).

³Soft money is raised and spent largely outside the federal law and is subject to limits imposed by state laws.

The introduction of modern primaries and caucuses opened the candidate selection process to a broader array of individuals and groups. By depriving the bosses of the ability to handpick their party's nominees, the new process created opportunities for a greater variety of individuals to compete for nominations. The process also increased the influence that ordinary citizens and organized groups could have on the nomination process. Individuals and groups began to play a larger role in shaping the pool of potential candidates and waging campaigns for the nomination.

Some contemporary interest groups work to encourage politicians who are sympathetic to their causes to run for Congress. Among them are EMILY's List, which recruits pro-choice Democratic women, and the Clean Water Action Vote Environment PAC, which recruits environmentalist candidates of both parties. These groups promise campaign contributions and other forms of support to those who ultimately decide to run for Congress. A few labor and professional association PACs, such as the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) and the American Medical Association's AMPAC, take polls to encourage politicians who support their group's positions to run. Before the 1996 election, the National Federation of Independent Business PAC went so far as to host a campaign training school for prospective candidates who supported the group's pro-business agenda. PAC activities can be important in helping an individual decide to run for Congress, but interest groups are less influential in candidate recruitment than are parties. Moreover, both groups and parties pale in influence when compared to a potential candidate's family and friends.

Campaign Activities PACs play an important role in the financing of congressional elections. Over 4,500 PACs were registered with the FEC during the 1996 election cycle, and roughly 3,000 of these PACs actually contributed nearly \$204 million to primary and general election candidates for the House and the Senate. The biggest spenders were corporate PACs, which contributed roughly \$78.2 million. These were followed by trade association PACs, which contributed \$60.2 million; labor PACs, which contributed \$48 million; and ideological PACs, which contributed another \$24 million. PACs sponsored by corporations without stock and cooperatives contributed another \$2.1 million and \$4.4 million, respectively. The scales of PAC-giving are clearly tipped in favor of business over labor interests.

Moreover, PAC contributions are fairly concentrated among a relatively small number of groups. Fewer than 450 PACs, or approximately 10 percent of all registered committees, distributed roughly \$165.6 million in contributions, or 76 percent of the total distributed in the 1996 elections. Just 180 PACs (4 percent of all PACs), accounted for nearly \$124.6 million in contributions (57 percent of the total). Few elements of American society are represented in the top 4 percent of PACs, and most are not represented in the top 10 percent. Many groups, such as the poor and homeless, have no representation in the PAC community. Although PAC goals and strategies vary, and PAC contributions may offset each other under some circumstances, figures on PAC formation and PAC spending serve to dispel pluralist notions that all interests are equally represented in the PAC community and have a comparable impact on the financing of congressional elections.

The distribution of PAC contributions to congressional candidates further demonstrates that there are other systematic biases to interest group activity in elections. PACs contributed \$140.4 million in major-party contested House elections in 1996.⁴ The lion's share of this money—nearly 75 percent—went to incumbents. Contestants for open seats received 12 percent, and challengers received a mere 13 percent. The patterns for Senate elections were similar. Of the nearly \$43.7 million that PACs spent in contested Senate elections, just 46 percent went to incumbents, slightly over 12 percent went to challengers, and 42 percent went to open-seat candidates.

The incumbent orientation of most PAC activity largely reflects the contributions of business-oriented committees, including most corporate and trade association PACs. Most of these committees focus on narrow issues that could affect their profits or those of their members. These PACs make contributions to ensure that their lobbyists have access to important policymakers. Backing likely winners is one of their first decision rules. This results in most of their money going to incumbents, who enjoy reelection rates of over 90 percent in the House and roughly 75 percent in the Senate. A second rule is to back individuals who have the potential to influence legislation that is of importance to the PAC and its parent organizations. Access-oriented PACs give a great deal of their money to party leaders and the chairs, ranking members, and members of committees and subcommittees that legislate in areas of concern to their sponsors.

A second group of PACs is more concerned with influencing the composition of Congress than seeking economic gain or maintaining access to the legislature's current membership. Nonconnected PACs, often referred to as ideological committees, make contributions to candidates who share their views on one or more often highly charged issues. Ideological PACs contribute a greater portion of their funds to congressional challengers and open-seat contestants than do most other committees. Most ideological PACs seek to back candidates in competitive contests, but some give contributions to ideologically sympathetic candidates who are long-shots in order to encourage their political careers. Ideological PACs make more independent expenditures than any other group, accounting for nearly half of those made in 1994.

The last group of PACs consciously pursues both goals. PACs that follow "mixed" strategies, which include most labor union and some trade association committees, contribute to powerful incumbents to maintain access to important policymakers. They also contribute to challengers and open-seat candidates in hotly contested races in order to help elect candidates who share their views. As a group, PACs that use mixed strategies make substantially more independent expenditures than corporate PACs and substantially fewer than nonconnected committees.

Some PACs also provide candidates with assistance in a variety of aspects of campaigning, including fund-raising, strategic, and grassroots support. EMILY's List is credited with helping to steer millions of dollars worth of individual contributions to pro-choice Democratic women. The Wish List plays a similar role for

⁴These figures are for general election candidates in typical races only. They exclude candidates involved in uncontested races, in runoff elections, or contests won by independents.

pro-choice Republican women. The Business Industry-Political Action Committee (BI-PAC) and COPE are examples of "lead PACs" that seek to influence the contribution decisions of other pro-business and labor PACs.

The National Committee for an Effective Congress (NCEC) is unusual in that it gives candidates technical and strategic assistance in lieu of cash. It provides Democratic candidates with geodemographic targeting data that help them identify pockets of likely supporters and persuadable voters. It then helps the candidates formulate campaign strategies designed to maximize their numbers of voters. The PAC plays a role in elections that is similar to that of the parties' congressional campaign committees.

Many ideological PACs, unions, religious organizations, and civic groups provide candidates with valuable endorsements and the volunteers needed to stamp envelopes, distribute campaign literature door-to-door, and mobilize voters on election day. Some also finance television, radio, and print advertisements criticizing congressional incumbents for their roll-call votes and failure to take action on issues that are of importance to their members. The AFL-CIO, which has traditionally been an important source of support for Democratic candidates, announced it would spend \$35 million and target seventy-five vulnerable congressional districts, many occupied by GOP House freshmen, to help the Democrats in their unsuccessful attempt to regain control of Congress in 1996. In addition to contributing money directly to the Democratic candidates through its PAC, the union aired television and radio commercials and organized its members at the grassroots. "The Coalition," a group of thirty-one business organizations headed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, sought to counter the AFL-CIO's effort but fell short of matching the union's campaign expenditures and voter mobilization activities.

Churches have historically been the locus of much of the political activity of African Americans. The voter registration and mobilization efforts of black churches have usually helped Democratic candidates. In the early 1980s, church-based organizations, such as the Christian Coalition, began to play an important role in mobilizing grassroots support for conservative Republicans. Before the 1996 election, the group announced plans to distribute 67 million voter guides.

Some candidates find interest group assistance to be extremely helpful. A few who are involved in very close elections may even consider it to have been critical to their success. As a group, PACs are the second-largest source of campaign money in congressional elections, surpassed only by individuals. During the 1996 elections, PAC funds accounted for just 30 percent of the money collected by House and 15 percent of the money collected by Senate general election candidates. Congressional candidates and their campaign aides consider PACs and other interest groups to be a major source of assistance in fund raising.

Congressional campaigners also consider interest groups helpful in other aspects of campaigning requiring technical expertise, in-depth research, political connections, and grassroots efforts. During the 1994 congressional elections, a number of interest groups, such as the National Association of Home Builders, Chamber of Commerce, National Federation of Independent Business, and the Christian Coalition, helped finance the research and advertising that went into the House Republicans' Contract with America and the nationalized election campaign that

accompanied it. These groups and others representing various interests and causes across the political spectrum were even more active in the campaigns of Democrats and Republicans in 1996. Nevertheless, most candidates appraise the assistance they receive from interest groups to be somewhat less important than what they receive from party committees.

The Road to the White House

Potential candidates for the presidency rarely need encouragement to run for office. The formal process by which one secures a major-party nomination lasts roughly a year, but aspirants for the White House spend years laying the groundwork for their campaigns. Interest groups often play important roles in this process by inviting candidates to address their members and donating funds to the PACs, tax-exempt organizations, and non-profit foundations that the candidates use to finance these preliminary presidential forays.

As noted earlier, the FECA makes individual contributions more valuable than PAC contributions in presidential elections. PACs rarely account for more than 2 percent of the money raised by major-party candidates during the primary season. But the law does not inhibit other organized group activity in campaign funding and other aspects of presidential elections. Interest groups influence the financing of presidential nomination campaigns by organizing fund-raising events, sharing their mailing lists, and coordinating the contributions of their members. Barred from contributing directly to candidates during the general election, groups assist candidates indirectly by contributing funds to their political party. A significant portion of these funds are contributed in soft money.

Corporations, trade associations, unions, ideological groups, and individuals representing these and other organizations contributed roughly \$262 million in soft money to Democratic and Republican Party committees during the 1996 election cycle. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) raised \$101.9 million and other Democratic committees raised an additional \$20.9 million, while their GOP counterparts raised \$111 million and \$27.2 million.⁵ Corporations, such as Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and labor unions, such as the United Steelworkers, are among the top soft money contributors. ADM and its chairman, Dwayne Andreas, contributed in excess of \$1 million to Republican Party committees and Bush's prenomination campaign committee in 1992, \$977,000 of which was contributed as soft money. For safe measure, ADM and Andreas also contributed \$90,000 to the DNC and an additional \$50,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee during the closing days of the general election campaign. Reflecting organized labor's staunch support for Democrats, the Steelworkers contributed \$398,876 in soft money to the Democratic Party in 1992 and nothing to the GOP. It is virtually impossible to pinpoint exactly where all these funds were spent, but significant portions went to voter registration and mobilization drives and party-building activities designed to influence the outcome of the presidential election.

⁵The figures have been adjusted to account for transfers among party committees.

127 Interest Groups

Interest groups also campaign for presidential candidates using many of the same activities they use in congressional elections. They use independent expenditures on television, radio, newspaper, and direct-mail advertisements to advance the election of one candidate over another. In 1992 they spent \$3.2 million to advocate the election or defeat of George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot. The biggest beneficiary was Bush; PACs made over \$2 million in independent expenditures on his behalf and less than \$35,000 against him.

Interest groups carry out issue advocacy campaigns to support a candidate's efforts without expressly promoting the candidate's election or the opponent's defeat. Groups also use internal communications to influence their members' voting decisions and turnout, and to recruit campaign volunteers. Finally, interest group money plays an important role in financing the major parties' conventions. The host committees for the 1996 Democratic and Republican conventions raised \$13.6 million and \$12.4 million, respectively, from corporations, unions, trade associations, and individuals who represented these and other interests.

At the Crossroads

The 1992 presidential and 1994 congressional elections led to a significant reversal of the pattern of divided government. Most of the interest group activity in congressional elections that occurred prior to 1994 was conditioned by the Democrats' control over Congress. The Democrats had held a majority of House seats for an uninterrupted forty years between 1954 and 1994, and they controlled the Senate for most of this period. Not surprisingly congressional Democrats were the primary beneficiaries of most interest group activity before the Republican takeover.

The 1994 elections ushered in a new era on Capitol Hill. Republican control of both the House and the Senate created a new set of realities for interest groups, particularly PACs. How have PACs responded to these realities? Have most continued to support Democrats, or have they switched their primary loyalties to the GOP? The patterns for the House are particularly striking. The Republican takeover had a profound impact on the partisan distribution of early PAC money. The contributions that corporate and trade association PACs made during the 1996 election cycle are almost the opposite of those given during the 1994 election. In 1994 corporate and trade association PACs gave roughly 58 percent of their House contributions to Democrats; in 1996 they gave two-thirds to the Republicans. These PACs' support for the GOP's pro-business agenda and desire to gain access to newly installed Republican committee and subcommittee chairs are principally responsible for the dramatic switch. Their concern with maintaining access to powerful members is an important factor in explaining both the PACs' switch to the Republicans and their continued contributions to incumbent Democrats. Democratic control of the White House also probably discouraged some PACs from abandoning the Democrats in favor of the GOP.

Ideological PACs were also influenced by the Republican takeover. They were able to galvanize their members, collecting and spending substantial sums. Their early contributions suggest that conservative PACs mobilized their members in order to help the GOP maintain control of the House. These PACs contributed

over three times more money to House Republicans in 1996 than they did in 1994, while liberal PAC contributions to Democrats fell slightly.

Even some labor PACs, which have traditionally been among the staunchest supporters of Democratic candidates, changed their giving patterns in response to the Republicans' winning control of the House. Labor PAC contributions to Republican incumbents increased from 3 percent in 1994 to 7 percent in 1996 as these groups attempted to secure access to the newly empowered Republican majority. The Seafarer's Union, for example, gave only \$51,100, or 10 percent of its House contributions, to fourteen House Republicans in the entire 1994 election, but gave \$73,000, or 29 percent of its funds, to twenty-nine GOP House members during the first session of the 104th Congress—a full year before the 1996 election.

It is more difficult to assess the impact of the Republican takeover of the Senate on PAC activities because different Senate seats are up for election every two years and the idiosyncrasies of the states and candidates involved can have a major impact on campaign finance patterns. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that many PACs, especially corporate committees, adjusted their early giving in Senate races in response to the GOP takeover of the upper chamber. Corporate PACs gave 59 percent of their Senate contributions to Republicans and 42 percent to Democrats in 1994. In 1996 these numbers changed dramatically when corporate committees gave 81 percent of their money to Republicans and 19 percent to Democrats. Trade association PACs also responded to the GOP's 1994 success. These groups had distributed 44 percent of their Senate contributions to Democrats and 57 percent to Republicans in 1994, but gave nearly three-quarters of their Senate contributions to GOP candidates in 1996.

The partisan distribution of ideological and labor PAC money was also affected by the Republicans winning control of the Senate. Republicans collected 44 percent of the ideological PAC money distributed to Senate candidates in 1994. The mobilization of conservative PAC dollars enabled GOP candidates to gather two-thirds of the PAC money ideological PACs distributed in 1996. Republican Senate candidates made only small inroads into the labor community. In 1994 Republicans received only 3 percent of all labor contributions to Senate candidates. In 1996 GOP candidates collected 5 percent of these funds.

While the patterns of early PAC activity in congressional elections have changed, it would be wrong to state that PACs have deserted the Democratic Party. Instead, the giving patterns suggest that some PACs, including many representing corporations and trade associations, have responded cautiously to the new order on Capitol Hill. They are more supportive of Republican incumbents because the GOP has become the majority party in both chambers, but most PACs continue to give substantial amounts to powerful incumbents on both sides of the aisle. Candice Nelson's analysis of early PAC contributions to House committee leaders and House Commerce Committee members supports this thesis, demonstrating that PAC funds to the recently installed Republican committee chairmen have increased significantly, but Democratic committee leaders continue to hold their own in PAC fund raising.

... [T]he figures presented in tables [6.1] and [6.2] suggest that the flow of early PAC dollars was informed by a sense of caution and a set of strategic

Table 6.1 ■ The Distribution of PAC Contributions in the 1994 and 1996 House Elections

	Corporate		Trade association		Labor		Nonconnected	
	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996
<i>Democrats</i>								
Incumbents								
Competitive contests	35%	11%	33%	12%	44%	22%	36%	12%
Uncompetitive contests	19	16	18	16	26	27	13	11
Challengers								
Competitive contests	—	1	1	4	5	25	2	13
Uncompetitive contests	—	—	1	—	7	6	2	2
Open seats								
Competitive contests	2	1	5	3	11	10	8	4
Uncompetitive contests	1	1	1	2	4	3	3	1
<i>Republicans</i>								
Incumbents								
Competitive contests	4	25	4	24	—	3	3	24
Uncompetitive contests	26	36	23	29	3	4	12	15
Challengers								
Competitive contests	6	2	6	3	—	—	10	7
Uncompetitive contests	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	1
Open seats								
Competitive contests	4	5	5	5	—	—	6	8
Uncompetitive contests	3	2	3	2	—	—	3	2
Total (in thousands)	\$38,213	\$46,118	\$34,411	\$40,054	\$30,110	\$35,781	\$10,520	\$13,718

Notes: The figures include only PAC contributions to general election candidates in two-party contested races. Candidates involved in uncontested races, runoff elections, or contests won by independents are excluded.

“—” indicates that PACs spent less than 0.5 percent of their funds in these races. Some numbers do not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

N for 1994 = 776; N for 1996 = 812.

Source: Compiled from Federal Election Commission data.

Table 6.2 ■ The Distribution of PAC Contributions in the 1994 and 1996 Senate Elections

	Corporate		Trade association		Labor		Nonconnected	
	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996
<i>Democrats</i>								
Incumbents								
Competitive contests	30%	6%	31%	8%	47%	19%	34%	11%
Uncompetitive contests	4	2	4	2	5	4	4	2
Challengers								
Competitive contests	—	1	1	3	13	15	2	5
Uncompetitive contests	2	—	1	—	8	2	2	—
Open seats	6	10	7	15	23	52	14	15
<i>Republicans</i>								
Incumbents								
Competitive contests	7	32	9	28	1	2	6	22
Uncompetitive contests	19	13	19	10	1	2	14	8
Challengers								
Competitive contests	9	9	7	7	—	—	10	8
Uncompetitive contests	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Open seats	24	27	21	26	1	1	14	26
Total (in thousands)	\$17,864	\$16,547	\$10,362	\$10,982	\$6,611	\$6,316	\$5,170	\$6,292

Notes: The figures include only PAC contributions to general election candidates in two-party contested races.

“—” indicates that PACs spent less than 0.5 percent of their funds in these races.

Some numbers do not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

N for 1994 = 68; N for 1996 = 68.

Source: Compiled from Federal Election Commission data.

(54)

considerations that emphasized supporting incumbents. PAC giving in 1995 and 1996 reflected the uncertainty surrounding the question of which party would control Congress following the 1996 elections and a strategic principle shared (then and now) by most corporate, trade association, and other business-oriented PACs that emphasizes maintaining access to powerful congressional leaders of both parties.

Unlike congressional elections, most of the interest group activity that took place in recent presidential contests occurred while a Republican was in the White House or was favored to capture it. In 1992, Democratic candidate Bill Clinton won the presidency, vanquishing incumbent Republican George Bush. Assessing the impact that a reversal of fortunes has on interest group activity in presidential elections is more difficult than it is for the House and the Senate because presidential candidates rely mainly on money collected from individual citizens and the federal government to finance their campaigns. PAC dollars do not play a big role in their campaigns.

Interest group money does, however, make its way into presidential election campaigns. . . . [B]oth President Clinton and GOP nominee Bob Dole were able to help their respective parties raise substantial sums of soft money from corporations, unions, trade associations, and individuals who represent particular groups. These funds, and the independent expenditures, internal communications, and issue advocacy campaigns that these groups undertake, played an important role in the 1996 presidential election. ■



The Comparative Context

Like other interest groups, foreign nations have a great stake in political decision making in Washington. Not surprisingly, therefore, foreign governments spend large sums of money to lobby American officials and to influence American public opinion in favor of policies they support.

Many foreign governments run such lobbying efforts, but few have come under as much scrutiny as that of Japan. Although the "Japanese Lobby" is extensive and influential and in many ways unique, argue the political scientists Ronald J. Hrebemar and Clive S. Thomas in this selection, the efforts of the Japanese government are not out of proportion to the stakes involved. Moreover, they suggest, criticism of the Japanese lobby may be based more on deep-seated prejudice than on the facts.

Questions

1. Why does the Japanese government direct much of its energy toward influencing the American public, as well as the American government? What methods does Japan use to influence American public opinion?

through an administrative agency. In the face of such changes, or the threat of them, the "old line" agency is highly inflexible.

If this already is a tendency in a pluralistic system, then agency-group relationships must be all the more inflexible to the extent that the relationship is official and legitimate.

Innumerable illustrations will crop up throughout the book. They will be found in new areas of so-called social policy, such as the practice early in the War on Poverty to co-opt neighborhood leaders, thereby creating more privilege than alleviating poverty. . . . Old and established groups doing good works naturally look fearfully upon the emergence of competing, perhaps hostile, new groups. That is an acceptable and healthy part of the political game—until the competition between them is a question of "who shall be the government?" At that point conservatism becomes a matter of survival for each group, and a direct threat to the public interest. Ultimately this threat will be recognized.

55

JEFFREY BIRNBAUM

From *The Lobbyists*

Journalist Jeffrey Birnbaum takes readers back to 1990, when Republican President Bush and the Democratic Congress took on the budget bill. From the start, the complex negotiations were fertile territory for Washington's corporate lobbyists. Lobbying is not a much-loved or well-respected activity. It epitomizes life "inside the Beltway." This excerpt from Birnbaum's fascinating account focuses on Wayne Thevenot, one of the many lobbyists who got involved in 1990's behind-the-scenes budget maneuverings. Thevenot, of Concord Associates (whose most important client was the National Realty Committee) was a Washington veteran who began as a congressional aide decades ago. Interest groups and lobbying, as James Madison anticipated, are inevitable in a large, diverse nation. Still, K Street, where many lobbying firms have their offices, might not have been exactly what Madison had in mind.

"Okay," the President says. "Let's talk."

IT IS THE BRIGHT, clear morning of Tuesday, June 26, 1990, and President George Bush is meeting in the White House with

his economic advisers and the congressional leaders of both parties. Together, over steaming coffee in the private quarters, they face a crisis. The federal budget deficit is careening out of control, and efforts to negotiate a solution are getting nowhere. At around 8:30 A.M., after an hour of fruitless talk, the Democrats finally assert that the President has run out of choices. He must renounce his "no new taxes" pledge—the oath that was instrumental in getting him elected. He must make a public statement, they say, about the need to raise taxes.

The room grows silent.

Then the President utters those fateful words.

Not long thereafter, a short statement is quietly tacked on to a bulletin in the White House press room. "It is clear to me that both the size of the deficit problem and the need for a package that can be enacted require all of the following," it reads, including the real shocker: "tax revenue increases."

The announcement hits Washington like an explosion. . . .

Later that morning in another part of town, the phones start ringing at Concord Associates, a small lobbyists-for-hire company that overlooks the Treasury Department in the Willard Office Building. Wayne Thevenot, a balding former staffer in the Senate, gets a call from his wife, Laura, who is also a lobbyist. And James Rock, a bearded former aide in the House, hears from his wife, Sue, who works inside the government on the staff of the Senate's budget committee. Both women bring the same news about the President's announcement, and both men confess embarrassment. "How could I not have known?" they each wonder. As lobbyists, they are no longer part of the government, but they know enough high officials in Washington to hear about most significant things before they are announced.

This time, as usual, they had plenty of opportunity to know in advance. Four days earlier, Rock had attended a lobbyists' breakfast where Robert C. Byrd, the powerful chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was the featured speaker. And just the day before, Thevenot had been among a small group of lobbyists who paid Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole to have lunch with them at the 116 Club, an exclusive haunt for lobbyists on Capitol Hill. If anyone in Washington had known what the President was going to do, these two would have. But apparently they knew nothing; neither had breathed a word about the momentous change.

Thevenot and Rock are surprised about the turn of events, but they are not disappointed. Far from it. This is just the kind of news lobbyists love; it gives them something to act on. As a result, their expensively decorated offices now hum with excitement. Unlike [American Trucking

Association lobbyist Thomas] Donohue and [his aide, Kenneth] Simonson, who work only for the truckers, Thevenot and Rock are freelance lobbyists. They sell their services to almost anyone who is willing to pay their fees. That means that bad news for corporate America is good news for them. Crisis is their stock-in-trade, and that is precisely what the President's statement has created. His words have greatly enhanced the prospect for a big tax increase and that probably will mean more clients for Thevenot and Rock—if they are able to act quickly. So Rock parks himself in a chair across from Thevenot, who sits behind his oversized partner's desk, and they begin to plot and plan. They decide to contact the liquor distributors with whom they had once met; surely they will fear a tax increase now and will want to hire more lobbyists. Maybe there is reason to talk to securities firms too, they speculate; and some extra retainers from the real estate industry ought to be easy to find. "It's time to go to work," Rock concludes. "Now!" . . .

Washington has become a club in which the line between those inside and those outside the government is not clearly drawn. Corporate lobbyists have so suffused the culture of the city that at times they seem to be part of the government itself. One result is that corporate America, once a perennial sacrificial lamb when it came to government crackdowns, has become something of a sacred cow. Not only are lawmakers and policymakers reluctant to make changes that would hurt businesses, they even have a tendency to try to help them, as long as budgetary pressures do not interfere. In 1990, Congress passed, and President Bush signed, the biggest deficit-reduction bill ever. But of its approximately \$140 billion in tax increases over five years, only 11 percent came from corporations. The rest came from individual, taxpaying families.

Most people outside of Washington see the world of corporate lobbyists in caricature: fat, cigar-smoking men who wine and dine the nation's lawmakers while shoving dollar bills into their pockets. If lobbyists were always so crass, surely they would be easier to understand. If they were so blatant, they would not be nearly as effective as they often are. And they are effective, at least on the margins. But it is there, in relatively small changes to larger pieces of legislation, that big money is made and lost. Careful investment in a Washington lobbyist can yield enormous returns in the form of taxes avoided or regulations curbed—an odd, negative sort of calculation, but one that forms the basis of the economics of lobbying.

The lobbyists' trade bears close similarity to the ancient board game Go, the object of which is to surround the enemy completely, cut him off from any avenue of escape, and thus defeat him. Blocking the decision-

maker at every turn is the object of any successful lobbying campaign. Equally important is not to allow the decision-maker to know that he or she is being entrapped. That makes lobbying both high-powered and discreet, a dangerous combination.

Over time, the sheer pervasiveness of corporate lobbyists has had a major impact on government policy, beyond just the lucrative margin of legislation. The fact that lobbyists are everywhere, all the time, has led official Washington to become increasingly sympathetic to the corporate cause. This is true among Democrats as well as among Republicans.

Lawmakers' workdays are filled with meetings with lobbyists, many of whom represent giant corporations. And their weekends are stocked with similar encounters. When lawmakers travel to give speeches, they rarely address groups of poor people. The big-money lobbies often pick up the tab, and their representative fill the audiences, ask the questions, and occupy the luncheon tables and through the cocktail parties that accompany such events. "That's the bigger issue," contends one congressional aide. "Who do these guys hang out with? Rich people. If you spend your time with millionaires, you begin to think like them." Lobbyists provide the prism through which government officials often make their decisions. . . .

Every lawmaker's chief interest is getting reelected. So lobbyists see it as their job to persuade lawmakers that voters are on the lobbyists' side. To that end, Washington has become a major marketing center, in which issues are created by interest groups and then sold like toothpaste to voters from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. Thanks to Washington-based direct-mail and telemarketing wizardry, corporations can solicit letters and phone calls from voters in any district in the nation. And clever Washington-based lobbyists know that the best way to guarantee that their point of view will be heard is to take constituents with them when they go to speak to members of Congress.

Lobbyists also function as unpaid staff to the decision-makers, who often don't have enough people on their own payrolls. Lobbyists contribute the money that lawmakers need to get reelected. And, more important, lobbyists provide information about both policy and process that government officials often cannot get from their own, often underfunded government agencies. Lobbyists are the foot soldiers and the friends of the people who run the government.

Sometimes corporate lobbyists are adversaries of the men and women who wield the federal government's enormous power. In every battle, there are winners and losers. And, sometimes, the lobbyists are the losers. Lobbyists also fight among themselves, because the corporate world is far

from monolithic. As in any industry, there are also plenty of bad lobbyists. Money is wasted; campaigns can be sloppy and ham-handed. Sometimes corporate lobbyists seem to succeed despite themselves. They are the gang that couldn't shoot straight, but they manage to hit their target often enough to make a difference.

Despite their key role in the world of government, lobbyists are almost always the junior players, because, ultimately, they do not make the decisions. Taken as a group, they are a kind of underclass in the nation's capital, a lower caste that is highly compensated, in part, to make up for their relatively low stature in the city's severely stratified culture. At the top of the hierarchy are members of Congress and Cabinet secretaries. Next come congressional and Cabinet staffs. And then, at the bottom, come lobbyists. Lobbyists chafe at this. But their status is readily apparent. Frequently they suffer the indignity of standing in hallways or reception areas for hours at a time. Theirs are the first appointments canceled or postponed when other business calls. They do not even like to be called "lobbyists." They prefer "consultants" or "lawyers." They also use euphemisms like "When I left the Hill . . ." to describe the moment they left the congressional payroll to take a lobbying job.

One lobbyist put his predicament succinctly: "My mother has never introduced me to her friends as 'my son, the lobbyist.' My son, the Washington representative, maybe. Or the legislative consultant. Or the government-relations counsel. But never as the lobbyist. I can't say I blame her. Being a lobbyist has long been synonymous in the minds of many Americans with being a glorified pimp." . . .

The Main Street of lobbying is K Street, a short stretch through the heart of the sleek downtown. Spanking-new office buildings, filled with law firms, lobbying firms, and the allied services of the influence industry, sprang up everywhere in the city, eventually forming an almost unbroken corridor that stretched from Georgetown at one end of the city to Capitol Hill at the other. When even more office space was needed, metal and stone edifices were built on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. By the 1990s, Washington was home to about eighty thousand lobbyists of one kind or another, and the number was still growing. . . .

Thevenot could ingratiate himself with the best of them, and often did. He once declared at a lobbyists' Christmas party that he wished one day to be the "kisser rather than the kisser." But he was not cloying in his demeanor. He could be full of country charm and bawdy wit, with a hail-fellow manner to match. Yet he carried himself with the broad-shouldered confidence of the weight lifter he once was. He drove big cars and worked for big money. But more than that, he was a big man

in Washington, a member in good standing of the political fraternity there. He might have been just a lobbyist, but in some circles he was a near equal of the lawmakers whose votes he worked to influence. He had been around for so long, he said, that to many lawmakers he was "as familiar as an old shoe." And he liked it that way.

At age fifty-four, Thevenot was sometimes bored by the repetitiveness of the legislative process. Other times he was frustrated by his inability to get things done. And having come of age in the Washington of the 1960s and early 1970s, he was forever bemoaning the "bullshitters and hurrah merchants" who were calling themselves politicians in the 1980s. But he still had not lost his touch or enthusiasm. He said he was "barnacle-encrusted," and deep down, still found fun—and, more important, profit—in playing the insider's game.

Thevenot was an access man. He survived on his ability to be accepted and trusted by the people with clout in Congress; his reputation rose and fell on having his telephone calls returned. He was not a technician. When he lobbied for changes in the tax code, for instance, he usually was versed only in the basic facts of the matter. For answers to deeper questions, he brought along an expert. But almost no one considered his need for backup a deficiency. Thevenot's job was more about strategy than details. He had to know whom to ask, when to ask, and how to ask for help, none of which was a simple question in the Byzantine world of Washington.

The secret of Thevenot's entrée was buried deep in the bayous and cotton fields of rural Louisiana. The third-oldest of eight children, Thevenot was the son of a failed farmer. "We built a house, started a farm, and proceeded to get poor," Thevenot recalled. "We also were the only ones who spoke clear English" in a region where Cajun patois was more the norm. His skill with language and his interest in government had brought him to where he was.

In the early 1960s, Thevenot worked as a television reporter for the NBC affiliate in Baton Rouge, and was part of the gang that covered the antics of the colorful governor, Earl Long. In 1963, Thevenot went over to the other side and became campaign manager for Gillis Long, a cousin of Russell's, who was waging an uphill fight for the U.S. House of Representatives against a two-term incumbent. Thevenot did a tremendous volume of work: everything from hiring hillbilly bands to trying to keep the candidate's driver out of jail. And when Gillis Long won, Thevenot's ticket to Washington had been punched.

The only problem was that the headstrong Thevenot was not interested in working for the even more headstrong Gillis Long. Thevenot told

58

Long that he would be his friend forever, but never again his employee. So Gillis Long telephoned Russell Long, then a U.S. senator, and asked him to find Thevenot a job. The one he found turned out to be as an elevator operator, but, in the hands of the resourceful Thevenot, it became a job with possibilities.

Between trips, Thevenot wrote speeches for his Senate patron. Soon, he moved out of the elevator and into more responsible positions on the staffs of committees that were run by Russell Long. These included panels with jurisdiction over small-business and post-office legislation. No matter what his title was officially, Thevenot always functioned as a top aide to Russell Long, who went on to become one of the most powerful men in Washington as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

When Russell Long had been drinking and was bruising for a brawl, Thevenot was there to spirit him away. He was also confidant to the mighty and friend to those who would become that way. He knew "Johnny" Breaux when he was a fellow staffer on Capitol Hill; Breaux went on to become a U.S. senator—in the seat vacated by Russell Long. Thevenot knew "Tommy" Boggs when he was the chubby teenage son of House Majority Leader Hale Boggs of Louisiana; in 1989 Boggs was running one of the biggest lobbying law firms in Washington. In short, Thevenot belonged to Washington's tight-knit Louisiana mafia, which like the Tabasco sauce from back home, wielded a fiery punch even in small quantities. "Thevenot's a piece of work," Senator Breaux explained. "He adds color to an otherwise bland city."

When Thevenot first left the Hill in 1975, he worked briefly for an investment-banking firm. But he soon realized that his life was too closely tied to Congress to abandon the Hill completely. Besides, he thought, becoming a lobbyist would get him faster to what was then his goal: making lots of money. "I decided that there was a point of diminished returns to being a staffer. I got to a point where I just sort of ran out of good ideas," he said. "I also had a family and financial obligations. I was making thirty-five thousand dollars a year, with four kids who had to go to college eventually. It was just not enough. So after nearly thirteen years it was just time to get out and cash in."

"I gave up the idea of changing the world. I set about to get rich."

With two friends, Thevenot set up the lobbying firm of Thevenot, Murray and Scheer. They represented a variety of business interests, but Thevenot was most drawn to real estate. After a few years, he left the partnership to become president and chief lobbyist for the National Realty Committee, one of the burgeoning new trade associations that represented specialized industry factions. The business world had grown too complex

and too fragmented for huge umbrella organizations, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, to represent adequately. So in 1969 the biggest real estate developers banded together to form an elite group. In the early 1980s, Thevenot became its most successful and best-known mouthpiece, and helped lead it to many victories on Capitol Hill.

The National Realty Committee's most sweeping win came in 1981, when real estate was lavished with new tax breaks at the prodding of President Reagan. That caused a spurt in development around the country, which redefined the skylines of the nation's cities and filled the pockets of Thevenot's clients with gold. Projects were planned not so much for the rent that they would bring in as for the tax benefits. The boom, however, was so excessive that it was not long before the tax goodies were taken away. "See-through skyscrapers" with no occupants to speak of were becoming a national embarrassment, and there was nothing that Thevenot could do about it. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 made real estate one of its biggest victims. Not only were the 1981 benefits excised, but some tax breaks of older vintage were trimmed away as well. It was a bloodbath for the industry. But, in typical form, Thevenot expressed his chagrin with a smile. "At least our people have nice big buildings of their own to jump from," he said.

Thevenot was not blamed for the disaster. Lobbyists rarely are when the industries they represent lose a legislative fight. He could have stayed with the National Realty Committee forever; indeed, he was on retainer to the group through 1989, at \$7,500 a month plus expenses, and continued to function as its top lobbyist. But he wanted a change, and a chance to make more money. So he decided to leave the full-time employ of the real estate industry and go out on his own. He affiliated with William Boardman, a tax lawyer and lobbyist for the engineering and construction industries, who had rented some fancy new office space (at about \$45 a square foot) in the Willard Office Building, which had been renovated with the help of Thevenot's early 1980s tax breaks. The two men called themselves Concord Associates, a reference to Boardman's Boston-area roots; on the elegantly papered walls they hung drawings of Revolutionary War scenes from battles around Concord.

In appearance, Thevenot was an odd mixture that mirrored the competing demands of his vocation—one part soft, another part hard as nails. He had the cherubic face of a Kewpie doll, and only slightly more hair. But he also had the beefy hands and swagger of the roughneck he was during the hardworking summers of his youth in sweltering Morgan City, Louisiana. Thevenot had come a long way since then. When Congress

reconvened in January 1989, he had been an invited guest at some of the fanciest gatherings in the nation's capital, and he spent most of his time hopping from one private party to another. Senator Charles Robb of Virginia had held a bash for three thousand people at Union Station to celebrate his election. But thanks to the National Realty Committee checks that Thevenot had delivered to Robb's campaigns in the past, Thevenot had been invited to a far smaller, more intimate party in the new senator's office.

What Thevenot did there was collect information, which for him was no insignificant task. He explained, "We're talking to everybody we can about what the general mood of the Congress is. What issues are they going to deem important? How are the members lining up? How strongly they feel, for example, about new taxes to deal with the deficit problem. That is what we do, it's a network, it's a game. All the people that we know, and we've done favors for, gotten jobs for, sent them business, are part of it. What you know and your ability to interpret it—your ability to understand what's important and what's not—is what it's all about."

56

WILLIAM GREIDER

From Who Will Tell the People

Almost every excerpt in this section is a criticism of interest groups. Students of American government need to know the problems inherent in group-based politics. Journalist William Greider, whose approach to writing about government is undeniably counter-culture, provides a story both tragic and uplifting. He details the politicization of Washington, D.C. janitors from powerless working-poor laborers, into the "Justice for Janitors" organization. Greider's account of the janitors' "rude and crude" tactics is both sad and shocking. The lesson to be drawn from the janitors' strategy, however, is depressing. Think about Greider's janitors as you sit in college classrooms or the professional offices college graduates occupy. How do they get cleaned and neatened for us each morning?

THE QUALITY OF democracy is not measured in the contentment of the affluent, but in how the political system regards those who lack personal advantages. Such people have never stood in the front ranks of politics, of course, but a generation ago, they had a real presence, at

“Rush From Judgment: How the Media Lost Their Bearings”*

JAMES FALLOWS

The main question left from the Monica era is: Was it inevitable? Not the trysts themselves—whether they were psychologically inevitable, apart from being insane, can now be left to various Clintons in their future books. Nor is it really worth pondering at the moment whether [special Prosecutor] Kenneth Starr’s fixation on the case, or the Republican Congress’s exploitation of it in the drive to impeachment, was inevitable. Their responses were logical extensions of the scorched-earth party politics of the last 15 years. We could say that Starr, former House speaker Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay, and the others resembled Bill Clinton (and [former Representative] Bob Livingston) in not being able to restrain their least attractive but apparently strongest drives.

The interesting question concerns the press. For most of the last year—from the weekend of January 19, 1998, when the three network news anchors began scrambling back from Havana, leaving Fidel Castro and the pope to meet in relative privacy, until the revving up of the impeachment hearings just after the congressional elections—Monica dominated coverage more completely than Watergate did until its final months, and more than the Vietnam War did through most of the 1960s. It was like nothing since . . . well, since the [Princess] Diana story of the preceding fall, and the O. J. [Simpson] story before that. And while Monica resembled Diana and O. J. in the degree of media saturation, it differed in that the press could claim to have “won” the Monica fight. Reporters (especially *Newsweek*’s Michael Isikoff) did win in a technical sense—rumors that sounded far-fetched at the beginning of the year were part of the stipulated body of fact by the end. (The turning point was of course the cigar story. Once that was true, presumptively everything else was too.) And the segments of the press that pushed the story hardest won in a larger sense: there is no denying that the episode has now taken on historic gravity, forever bracketing Clinton at least with Andrew Johnson and conceivably with Richard Nixon.

But neither the Clintonian self-indulgence that started the story nor

*Footnotes accompanying this reading in its original publication have been deleted.

the Republican determination that may end it mean we can just forget about everything that happened in between. Through much of the year, polls indicated that people thought Clinton had behaved like an idiot—but that didn't keep them from also being skeptical of Starr. The press should be capable of at least as complex a view. A volley of our shots finally hit a target, but it is still worth asking how many were fired, what they were aimed at, and who else got killed.

If Clinton's excesses were depressing for their familiarity, exactly the same is true of the press's. The most surprising aspect of the Monica excesses was how unsurprising—how perfectly predictable—they were. I mean that literally: the first week the story broke, we held a meeting at *U.S. News & World Report*, where I was then the editor, to think about the ways in which the news biz was most likely to screw up in the coming months. The idea was to increase by at least a tiny degree our resistance to exactly these errors. But as the months went on, it was as if every media hand-wringing session held in the aftermath of the Rodney King* coverage, every bit of press introspection after the era of O. J., every purported lesson of the Diana orgy, had never occurred—notwithstanding that, again, the press "won" in the sense that Clinton ended up getting impeached. The fundamental and predictable problem was a return of an "all or nothing" mentality, in which the running spectacle-story of the moment—be it Monica, Diana, or a war—squeezes everything else out of the news. The extent of the squeeze is most noticeable when two would-be spectacles interfere with each other and fight it out for coverage: the O. J. verdict and a State of the Union address, for instance, or an impeachment vote and the start of a war on Iraq. Even if we stipulate that every accusation against Clinton was true, even if we assume (as I do not) that he should have been impeached, it's still hard to contend that the story should have forced out so many other subjects for such a long time.

So, was this all inevitable—the press's recapitulation of its past excesses? The answer is surprisingly significant, no matter what you think the correct answer is. If reporters, editors, and broadcasters really had no choice in the matter and were forced to overlay Monica for commercial reasons—or because of the rise of the Internet, or whatever—then journalism is in a worse predicament than even Newt Gingrich might think. But if, on the other hand, reporters and editors had more room to maneuver than most now claim, and were able to shape the coverage by their own choice, then it's worth wondering how they might make different choices the next time.

*[Rodney King was an African-American whose severe beating by the Los Angeles Police Department was captured on videotape by an eyewitness. The subsequent acquittal of the officers who beat King sparked massive riots.]

What Went Wrong

For the record, what exactly was embarrassing about the press’s performance in this case? For half a dozen years critics inside and outside the press have worked up a standard list of complaints about Media Gone Wrong. Nearly everything that was generally thought to be a problem proved to be a problem when exposed to Monica.

No Sense of Proportion

This was the big one. It is reassuring to go back to an old newspaper or newsmagazine and see that events considered important in retrospect got attention at the time. (“Hitler Invades Poland.”) It is intriguing but less heartening to go back and see saturation coverage for trends or events that seem like sideshows once they are done. (Banner headlines about the departure of Bert Lance from the Carter administration, for one example; or the mere existence of the Menendez brothers,* for another.) As a child I used to play a board game that had been my father’s when he was a boy; it involved making up a newspaper front page from a supply of stock stories and headlines. LINDBERGH BABY KIDNAPPED! CRYSTAL PALACE BURNS! The screaming power of the headlines told more about the mood of the 1930s than about the lasting meaning of such events.

Journalists aren’t supposed to be historians, but if we have any claim to expertise over the typical guy in a bar, it should lie in our ability to say: This event is more significant than that one, and I’m going to explain why. That ability is what the famed “nose for news” is all about.

The Monica frenzy will, I suspect, be seen in the long run as a Bert Lance/Menendez brothers moment rather than a Watergate moment in press coverage—or more precisely, as an Andrew Johnson rather than a Richard Nixon event. That is, as an episode whose heavy media coverage illustrates the mood of its times rather than reflecting the magnitude of the story itself. The problem with all-out saturation coverage, whether about Diana or Monica, is what gets left out—all the things that aren’t written about, published, or placed into public awareness because of the obsession of the moment. It may seem that in the age of cable TV, talk radio, and the Internet there is a limitless amount of space for news. But two journalistic vehicles remain incredibly short on space—network TV broadcasts, and weekly newsmagazines—and only so many stories can fit on a newspaper’s front page. Anyone who’s worked in a big news organization knows that when a Monica- or O. J.-style frenzy begins, other news simply gives way. The foreign correspondents take long(er) lunches, the people writing about science or the economy leave work

*[The Menendez brothers were convicted of murdering their parents.]

early, the "news hole" for non-scandal news disappears. You can see the effect on shows designed to add perspective—*Nightline*, even *Crossfire* or *Larry King Live*. When there's no O. J.-style story, their producers have to think up new topics. During a frenzy they stop trying, and thereby magnify rather than offset the impression that only one thing matters in the world.

Prediction Rather Than Explanation

It is now clear that, apart from lucky-number psychics, political pundits have the worst track record of any group that presumes to tell the future. Scientists might be worse when it comes to predicting at what moment, exactly, cold fusion will work—but the point is, they don't try. *Two days* before the 1998 election, every pundit who went on record on the talk shows and opinion sections foresaw that the Republicans would gain seats in both the Senate and the House.

The complaint is not that their guesses were wrong—mine would have been too. It is instead that the journalistic culture now places so much emphasis on something it can't do—guessing—rather than on the interpretation and explanation it could presumably do better if it tried. This habit was on full display during the Monica era, starting with the immediate "This presidency is over!" pronouncements on the Sunday shows. Through the next ten months, as if by reflex, pundits and "normal" reporters alike turned each day's events into an opportunity for speculation about what they thought would happen a day, a week, a year from now. With their emphasis on why Politician X might adopt Strategy Y, talk shows began to resemble the [television comedians] Chris Farley/George Wendt "Da Bears" skits on *Saturday Night Live*, in which beery sports fans compare predictions of who would win if Godzilla and Mike Ditka had a fight. The one exercise in prediction that proved to be useful—*Slate's* "Clintometer," assessing the day-by-day probability of Clinton leaving office—was the exception proving the rule, since in the guise of a forecast it was actually an analysis, explaining the impact of recent events.

Why spend so much time prognosticating, when the current evidence—Clinton still in office, no Republican gains at the polls—suggests we might as well have been gassing about Da Bears? There is a possible high-road answer: since Washington politics involves constant reassessment of who is stronger than whom, there's a point in discussing who might win the next election or the next test of strength. There is a low-road answer too: this kind of speculation is unbelievably easy, because it requires no extensive reporting or research. And there is a real answer, which is that the barroom forecasting has become so prominent *precisely because* no one in the media takes it seriously. If they did take it seriously, then like racing touts or investment strategists who made chronically bad calls, they'd risk being out of business. Instead, it's a pro

wrestling exercise, a lark. Three days after the 1998 election, a roundtable of pundits on the nationally syndicated Diane Rehm radio show chortled about how wrong they'd all been about the results. Next question from Rehm: "So, what do the results mean for the Year 2000 presidential election?" Since the experts had not been able to see one day into the future, maybe they'd have better luck looking ahead two years. Rehm sounded sheepish as she asked, but the experts plugged right ahead—except, to his credit, NPR's Daniel Schorr, who pointed out the insanity of the exercise.

Internally Driven Stories

Institutions fall apart when they start doing what's convenient for internal reasons, rather than addressing the outside world—the customer who has to be wooed, the enemy who needs to be fought, the mystery that has to be solved.

Monica was an "internal" story from the start. It was interesting to people in Washington because it was about people in Washington. The sense of zip in the whole city picked up—as you drove through town, you saw crowds of cameramen outside the grand jury site; pundits, lawyers, and politicians scooted from studio to studio to give their latest views. Meanwhile, in sharp contrast to the O. J. and Diana stories, Monica was not doing much for newsstand sales or viewership. When the Starr Report was finally released, cigar and all, it sold strongly; and niche cable outlets could attract larger-than-normal audiences by concentrating on Monica news. But most weeks the story did not do well for news-magazines or network news—and yet the media kept dishing it out.

Journalists are not, of course, just shopkeepers meeting market demand. The highest achievement of the trade is to make people care about and understand events or subjects they had not previously been interested in. This requires journalists to be internally guided to a large degree—but not just by parochial, insider obsessions. Sally Quinn's notorious "This Town" article, published in the *Washington Post* the day before the 1998 election, attracted immediate attention because it was smoking-gun proof of how parochial the obsessions could be. People who had spent their careers in Washington—and referred to it as "this town," as Quinn pointed out—were mad at Clinton for (as they imagined it) making their culture look bad, and they took it out on him with their reports. An internal compass is one thing; a Marie Antoinette—like assumption that the masses are wrong is something else.

Use by Leakers

Leaks are inevitable, and so is relying on them in reporting. But since leakers always have a motive, journalists serve their readers by suggesting the context in which leaked information should be seen. Failure to

do so was rampant during the first six months of the Monica saga. Many of the incredible-seeming, leaked claims of the first few weeks turned out to be true (the cigar, the dress, the months-long liaison story itself). A few did not (the President being caught *in flagrante delicto* by his staff). What seems clear about nearly all the claims is that they came from sources with an ax to grind against the White House—Lucianne Goldberg, the Paula Jones defense team, and (circumstantial evidence strongly suggests) the independent counsel's staff.* This was the most valid point Steven Brill made in his widely publicized debut article in *Brill's Content*: whether the claims against the President proved true or false, the readers deserved a clue about the motivation behind the leaks—and significantly more protection against a torrent of purely anonymous leaks.

Merger of Entertainment and News

For a decade or more the news business has been trapped in a vicious cycle. Nervousness about falling market share leads to more tabloid-style gore-and-celebrities emphasis in the news. This higher tabloid quotient puts normal news more in head-to-head competition with real tabloids (*Hard Copy*) or real entertainment coverage (*People*, *Entertainment Weekly*), and its market share shrinks further still. If this is the news, even the natural audience for the news thinks: Who needs it?

Within a week or two, the tabloid-entertainment component of the Monica story overtook its other meanings, and the cycle continued.

Making the Journalists the Story

Consult "White House in Crisis" on the Fox News Channel, any hour of the day.

The Press Is Nuts

But wait! Maybe we are being too negative. Maybe in remaining true to past traits the press did the job it was meant to do. That is one of several ways to view the Monica record. Let's consider four hypotheses, each with different implications for what is inevitable in the future of journalism.

The Press Went Nuts, but That's how the Press Is, so Calm Down

This might be called the Lewis Lapham hypothesis. In the last few years Lapham, the editor of *Harper's*, has written wry essays saying that we

*[Lucianne Goldberg, a literary agent, encouraged Linda Tripp to record Lewinsky's confessions. Paula Jones alleged that Clinton sexually harassed her during his tenure as governor of Arkansas. She and Clinton reached an out-of-court settlement of the civil suit she brought against him.]

are but a band of jesters, and that it's pompous to expect anything more than tabloid-mindedness from the press.

For the real tabloids, this is a completely convincing defense. I love reading *Weekly World News* and the *National Enquirer*, because they are true to their mission. But that mission hardly fits the pretensions of the punditariat that kept the Monica story alive.

The Press Went Nuts, and That's the Price of Liberty

We can call this the Maureen Dowd hypothesis, after the *New York Times* columnist who wrote countless screeds against Clinton before turning against Starr late in the year. When the election was over—but the impeachment vote had not yet re-legitimized the emphasis on Monica—she conceded that she was tired of the Monica story, and that the press had run amok in various ways. But: despite public hostility, reporters had just been doing their essential job. "The impure history of modern America—Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra—proves that reporters have a duty to dig for the truth, whatever the public thinks. . . . The danger is that next time, when the cover-up takes place in a less gray area, reporters will look at the numbers and go home early. Next time, it may not be about sex and lies. It may be about life and death."

OK: When it is about life and death, reporters should dig like crazy—as a few did during Watergate, more during Vietnam, not enough during Iran-Contra (nor during the financial life and death savings and loan scandal). The whole idea behind "news judgment" is that reporters and editors can draw such distinctions: certain misdeeds are truly ominous, others are merely disgusting. If anything, the press's power to draw attention to genuine life and death problems is diminished if it treats every passing scandal as a "cry wolf" cataclysm.

Let's assume that, after fully exercising their news judgment, some reporters and editors thought that Clinton's sins were of life and death magnitude, and that he had to be removed. That would be a reason to keep reporters on the story, to keep the stories in the paper (or on the air), and to ignore the indications that the public didn't care. The public doesn't always know what's good for it. But even assuming all that, the idea of *proportionality* remains. Not even Tom DeLay would think that Clinton's evil blots out every other topic in the world.

The Press Went Nuts, and Things Will Only Get Worse

Here we return to inevitability, and what might be called the Marvin Kalb hypothesis. Just before last fall's election, Kalb, a longtime TV newsman and more recently the director of the Joan Shorenstein Center at Harvard, published an essay on the rise of the "New News." Monica coverage was indeed rushed, sloppy, and disproportionate, Kalb said.

And in these failings it reflected deeper structural changes in the press, especially these two developments:

- Runaway technology, ranging from internet "publishers" like Matt Drudge, to portable newscams that allow live coverage of countless local disasters, to the proliferation of cable channels that keep the news cycle running 24 hours a day. The cumulative effect of these changes, Kalb says, has been to make it harder for journalists to exercise judgment even if they wanted to. As the news system has become more fragmented, readers and viewers have more choices than in the days of the Big Three broadcast networks. That is arguably good for the viewer—but it makes producers and editors so nervous about their vanishing audiences that they have none of the gravitas that surrounded CBS or NBC in the old days. And the speed with which rumors get "out there," and must be reported on, frightens editors away from their fundamental role, which is to draw the line between private and public information.
- A shift in the underlying business model, away from the complicated mixture of goals a generation ago and toward a simple emphasis on profitability and ratings. When TV and newspapers were covering the Watergate story, many significant outlets were not even expected to turn a profit (the network news divisions were run as loss leaders), and the main newspapers were family-dominated businesses with an expressed mission beyond quarterly profit. By the time of the Monica story, the only main not-for-profit outlets were NPR and PBS, while the corporate quarterly profit model was in place at the broadcast networks and most newspapers. The main structural change for the better in the intervening generation was the creation of C-SPAN. As the quarterly profit model spreads, there are familiar ripple effects: fewer foreign bureaus, less investment in reporting, more tabloid stories, and news as pure product rather than as a business with a major impact on public life.

These trends are real. But emphasizing them has a peculiar consequence: in the short term, it excuses journalists their excesses in the Monica (or Diana, or O. J.) case. But in the long term it should make reasonable people wonder: Why stay in this business at all? If the worst parts of the New News really do represent the inevitable future, then perhaps sane reporters should drop the First Amendment folderol, stop pretending that their role is to help us understand what's going on in the world, and start describing themselves as "content providers," and nothing more. Some content providers will provide sophisticated news to an up-scale readership, via the *Financial Times* and online services. Others will provide mass fare, as network programmers or entertainment-magazine editors do. But the idea that this "content" is at all special—that it deserves its unique protection from government control—is a stretch.

The Geriatric Punditariat

This being America, there is a fourth, happier alternative. Despite the business and technological pressures, despite the nuttiness of the year just past, there are two good reasons to think, or hope, that the press can do a better job next time.

One is that some of the press did a better job this time. After the frenzied first month, some editors began reasserting their responsibility—just because a rumor was "out there," via Matt Drudge, they didn't have to carry it themselves until they'd satisfied their own standards of proof. By midsummer, there were fewer stories based on purely anonymous sources (perhaps because there were fewer juicy nuggets left to report). Some news organizations kept the story in perspective—"perspective" meaning the recognition that other things were going on in the world. The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page naturally trumpeted the Clinton Crimes as an ongoing series, but the very format of the *Journal's* news pages, with no eight-column headlines, forced the story into a more proportionate role. If these people figured out a way to handle New News pressures, maybe there is still room for individuals to make a difference.

The other source of hope is less high-minded and perhaps therefore more reliable. The media culture that produced these effects may be described in various ways—experienced, isolated, sophisticated, cynical, articulate, pompous, the list goes on. But for our purposes its most salient trait is that it is *old*.

By the end of this year, I will be 50—a fact that makes me feel like an absolute geezer most of the time. But not among the punditariat! When I compare myself to the people who have set the media tone during the Monica era, the spring of youth returns to my step. ABC's *This Week* contains one panelist under 40—George Stephanopoulos, who will be 38 this year—but the rest are, umm, "seasoned veterans": Sam Donaldson, 65; George Will, 58; Cokie Roberts, 56. On *Meet the Press*, Tim Russert (49) often hosts David Broder (70) and William Safire (70). *Face the Nation* gives us Bob Schieffer (62) and Gloria Borger (46). Ted Koppel will be 59; Charlie Rose, 57; Jeff Greenfield, 56; David Gergen, 57. The nation's three main editorial pages are directed by Howell Raines (56), Meg Greenfield (69), and Bob Bartley (62). Network news: Dan Rather (68), Peter Jennings (61), Tom Brokaw (59). Jim Lehrer will be 65. On *60 Minutes* we have Mike Wallace (81) plus Ed Bradley (58), and Morley Safer (68). Among talk show regulars, John McLaughlin will be 72, Robert Novak 68, Pat Buchanan 61, Howard Fineman 51, and Margaret Carlson refuses to divulge her age. Today's enfante terrible, Maureen Dowd, will be 47; yesterday's, Sally Quinn, will be 58. (All ages are as of the end of 1999.)

Yes, there are exceptions, including the numerous MSNBC-ettes who

have made their names on Monica. Writing has never been the province of child prodigies, and many writers are sharper, wiser, and better at age 70 than they were at 35. The reporters we admire most are those who use each year to learn something new, and whose achievement grows through their life. Tom Wolfe will be 68! Oh, to be as young as him! Writing is one of the few trades that can demonstrably be practiced at the highest level till very late in life.

But there is such a thing as an old, complacent establishment. And today's press hierarchy looks very much like it. Unlike Tom Wolfe, it is not constantly searching for new worlds or experiences. Unlike itself a generation ago, it seems less fascinated by testing, improving, and expanding the possibilities of its craft than in (often harrumphingly) exercising the power it enjoys.

Discouraging? Yes, but only in the short run. The thing about old orders is that, inevitably, they pass.

43

"Newspapers Savaged Other Presidents Too"

LINDA LOTRIDGE LEVIN

Did your readers tell you that the media spent too much space and time covering President Clinton's sexual peccadillos and the impeachment proceedings?

Why not tell them you're merely following a long tradition of newspapers beating up on presidents for their alleged sexual sins. If anything, the press of today is far easier on the president than newspapers as far back as the 17th century.

In a letter to the editor of the *New York Evening Post* in 1886, President Grover Cleveland called newspapers purveyors of "silly, mean and cowardly lies" when they attacked his plan to marry a woman more than 30 years his junior.

"They have used the enormous power of the modern newspaper to perpetuate and disseminate a colossal impertinence, and have done it, not as professional gossips and tattlers, but as the guides and instructors of the public in conduct and morals. And they have done it, not to a private citizen, but the President of the United States, thereby lifting their offense into the gaze of the whole world, and doing their utmost to make American journalism contemptible in the estimation of people of good breeding everywhere," Cleveland wrote.

Nor was Cleveland the first president to have his personal life hung

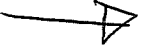
The Master of Spin



View from the Inside

The president's press secretary plays a critical role. On a day-to-day basis, he or she is the president's main link to the White House press corps and, through them, to the American people. The press secretary's main job is to "spin" actual or potential news stories in order to make the president look good.

The press secretary's relationship with the White House press corps is by nature delicate. To earn the reporters' trust, the secretary must be honest. But to present the



president's best face to the public, he or she must bob and weave around the truth, or at least wink at it.

Mike McCurry, who served as President Clinton's press secretary from 1995 to 1998, was the acknowledged grand master of this delicate balancing act. In this excerpt from *Spin Cycle*—subtitled *How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News*—the reporter Howard Kurtz describes McCurry's methods.

Questions

1. How did Mike McCurry manage to maintain the confidence of the White House press corps while at the same time “spinning” news stories in a positive way?
2. Are White House efforts at “spin control” legitimate in a democratic society, or do they undermine the American political system? Do such efforts compromise the media's role as a bulwark against the government? When does the White House cross the line between acceptable “spin” and unacceptable deception?

7.4 The Master of Spin (1998)

Howard Kurtz

One thing about Mike McCurry, he knew how to play the game. He understood the ebb and flow of the fungible commodity called news. A trim, blue-eyed man with thinning blond hair, a pink complexion, and an often bemused expression, McCurry was a spinmeister extraordinaire, deflecting questions with practiced ease, sugar-coating the ugly messes into which the Clintonites seemed repeatedly to stumble. He would mislead reporters on occasion, or try to pass them off to one of the damage-control lawyers who infested the public payroll. He would yell at offending correspondents, denounce their stories as inaccurate, denigrate them to their colleagues and their bosses. He would work the clock to keep damaging stories off the evening news, with its huge national audience. Yet with his considerable charm and quick wit, McCurry somehow managed to maintain friendly relations with most of the reporters who worked the White House beat. He would go to dinner with reporters, share a beer, give them a wink and a nod as he faithfully delivered the administration's line. He was walking the tightrope, struggling to maintain credibility with both the press and the president, to serve as an honest broker between the antagonists.

Each day, it seemed, McCurry faced a moral dilemma. He stood squarely at the intersection of news and propaganda, in the white-hot glare of the media spotlight, the buffer between self-serving administration officials and a cynical pack of reporters. The three principles of his job, he believed, were telling the truth, giv-

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ing people a window on the White House, and protecting the president, but the last imperative often made the first two difficult. If the corporate spokesman for Exxon or General Motors stretched the truth on occasion, well, that was seen as part of the job. McCurry himself had once been a corporate flack, trumpeting the virtues of the National Pork Producers Council. But now he worked for the head hog, and more was expected of the presidential press secretary, whose every syllable was transcribed by news agencies. He was the public face of the administration. His credibility, not just the president's, was on the line.

As the campaign fundraising scandal exploded, McCurry found himself facing the question that had dogged every presidential press secretary since the Nixon administration: whether it is possible to tell the truth, or something approximating the truth, in a highly polarized and constantly shifting political atmosphere. McCurry dearly prized his personal reputation for candor. He developed a series of rules and rationalizations to persuade himself that while he sometimes tiptoed up to the line separating flackery from falsehood, he never crossed it.

Yet McCurry was more than just the White House publicist. In a news-saturated age the press secretary was a celebrity in his own right, laying down the rhetorical law on dozens of issues, saying things the president wanted said but could not, for reasons of propriety, say himself. McCurry's predecessors had gone on to write books, join university faculties, or, like Dee Dee Myers, host their own television shows and give speeches for \$15,000 a pop. But all this came at a considerable price: the gut-wrenching pressure, the seven-day weeks, the hostile questions day after day.

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When McCurry took over in 1995, he quickly established that he knew what was going on. He attended any meeting he thought was worth his time. He got answers from the president when necessary. He was a year and a half into his job before he found himself misleading the press.

The messy situation bubbled to the surface on a campaign trip to Orlando in the summer of 1996. It was two weeks after the tabloid revelations about Dick Morris and his \$200-an-hour call girl had upstaged the president on the final day of the Democratic convention. When the story broke, Morris called McCurry on the president's campaign train, which was chugging toward Chicago, and started to describe what had happened. "Stop, Dick," McCurry said. He warned Morris not to tell him the sordid details so he could plead ignorance with the press. A don't ask/don't tell policy was often the safest course for a spokesman.

Now White House officials wanted to put the banished political consultant and his sexual antics behind them. But the tabloid frenzy had not yet run its course. *The National Enquirer* and its sister publication, *The Star*, were back with new, equally bizarre allegations about Morris: he had a secret mistress in Texas and had fathered a six-year-old girl—a "love child," in the overheated parlance of the tabs. The story was a disaster for a campaign trying to run on a platform of school uniforms and family values. The question, McCurry knew, was whether the mainstream press had had its fill of Dick Morris, or whether the story would spread from the supermarket rags to the media elite. After all, this was no ordinary hired gun; Clinton had been friends with Morris since the consultant first helped him win the Arkansas governorship in 1978.

At the briefing that Friday afternoon, reporters asked McCurry if the president knew of the *Enquirer* and *Star* reports. McCurry was cagey. He said Clinton was aware of the articles but that "he has no knowledge of whether it is true or not."

That didn't satisfy CBS's Rita Braver. What, she demanded, was Clinton's reaction to the stories? "He said, 'Is it true?' And we said, 'We don't know,'" McCurry recalled. Trying to shut down this line of questioning, he used a tactic that had worked well for the Clinton camp during the '92 campaign. He chided Braver for basing her question on mere "tabloids," as if such behavior were beneath her. When John Harris of *The Washington Post* called later and pressed him about the chronology, McCurry lectured him, too, about descending into the tabloid gutter.

The strategy was quite premeditated. "I was trying to blow the thing off and get back to the news the president was trying to make," McCurry said later.

But one reporter wouldn't let the matter drop. Matthew Cooper of *Newsweek* called McCurry the next day and got him to acknowledge that Clinton had known of Morris's out-of-wedlock daughter all along, that he had been given the news the previous year by Erskine Bowles.

How, then, could McCurry have stuck to his story of presidential ignorance? His explanation was as convoluted as Clinton's shifting stories about the draft. It was all a misunderstanding, McCurry claimed. He said the president's "Is it true?" response was not about Dick Morris's mistress or the child. Instead, he said, Clinton was questioning the *Enquirer's* report that Morris was still dating the Texas woman, and had entertained her a month earlier in the \$440-a-night Jefferson Hotel suite where he had also frolicked with prostitute Sherry Rowlands. In true spokesman fashion, McCurry said he saw no conflict between Clinton's employment of Morris and his "very strong concern about child support."

Still, the press secretary's ploy paid off. Unable to confirm that Clinton knew of the relationship and uneasy about chasing the tabloids, none of the networks reported on Morris's triple life. Nor did *The New York Times* or the *L.A. Times* or *USA Today*. *The Washington Post* mentioned the mistress in a single paragraph deep in a campaign story. Now that reporters knew the president had knowingly employed a political strategist who had fathered an illegitimate child—well, it was old news. The press had moved on. McCurry and his boss had dodged another bullet.

One of McCurry's pet projects in the wake of the election was to convince Clinton to court the media, to turn his fabled charm on the small band of men and women who chewed up and spit out his words for the American public. Clinton had little use for the fourth estate—he had not forgotten the way its members tormented him over the scandals of his first term, from Gennifer Flowers to Paula Jones to Whitewater, Travelgate, and Filegate—and he was stubbornly resisting McCurry's peacemaking initiatives. Why should he, the president of the United States, the man in charge of America's nuclear arsenal, have to romance journalists whose job was to cover him? And why did a small pack have to trail him whenever he went to a bookstore or a restaurant, even when he was out jogging? McCurry patiently explained that this was the "body watch," part of their job description; he might be shot, or just stumble and fall, or stop to answer questions.

"That's their game, not mine," Clinton replied. "They don't have to follow me when I jog. I'm not going to make news or talk about nuclear war."

It was a discussion they had had many times. Here was one of the great retail politicians of the modern age, a man who had to shake every hand in the room, who would spend ten minutes arguing with a recalcitrant voter while his staff anxiously beckoned him to the next event, and yet he had little patience for reporters with megaphones that could reach millions. They were, in his view, largely nit-pickers, naysayers, political handicappers with little interest in the substance of governing. They thrived on building themselves up by knocking him down.

Dick Morris, who knew Clinton as well as anyone, concluded after the campaign that the president hated the press. "He is contemptuous of reporters," Morris said. "He feels they're a sleazy group of people who lie a lot, who pursue their own agendas, who have a pack mentality. He feels they are a necessary evil."

What really infuriated the president, and Hillary, was the way the press kept changing the parameters of scandal. First the two of them would be accused of improperly benefiting from an Arkansas land deal. When that didn't pan out, the focus would shift to another land development, or a fraudulent loan, or missing billing records, or, when all else failed, the supposed cover-up. But the press never told anyone they had been cleared of the original charges. The reporters just kept morphing the Whitewater saga into some new configuration. They seemed to have a bottomless appetite for the most trivial semblance of an allegation.

The president's aides believed that Clinton was surprisingly naive about the press. He thought that if you were nice to reporters, they would be nice to you. George Stephanopoulos had often been struck by Clinton's feeling of betrayal when some journalist whom he had been courting wrote a tough piece. The president didn't understand that it was nothing personal, just part of the game. White House staffers were surprised that he hadn't become more inured to this sort of rough-and-tumble during his twelve years as governor.

If you would spend a fraction of your persuasive skills winning them over, McCurry argued, there would be a big payoff. But Clinton, angry about various slights, his resolve buttressed by thick layers of scar tissue, would not play. These journalists were wedded to "the old notion that all politicians are hopelessly corrupt and incompetent," he said. Screw the press.

And yet on a Friday afternoon in the waning days of 1996, McCurry finally got his way as the president sat down in the small dining room off the Oval Office with three high-profile pundits: *Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter, Gerald Seib of *The Wall Street Journal*, and Jacob Weisberg of *Slate*, Microsoft's online magazine. McCurry had selected them as a provocative group of progressive writers who would be receptive to Clinton's view of the world. "Alter bites my ass sometimes, but at least he understands what we're trying to do," Clinton once told an aide. The session was declared off-the-record, so Clinton could relax.

The president gave them The Treatment. He showed them around the Oval Office, the small adjacent study, where he had a bunch of ties laid out, and his private dining room. He told Alter that he had liked one of his recent columns. Weisberg gave him a *Slate* cap, and Clinton put it on and posed for a picture. They chatted about China policy and other issues over cider and cookies. When Alter asked about campaign finance reform, Clinton noted that Weisberg had just written "a great story" on the subject and proceeded to critique it. The

257 THE VIEWER

atmosphere seemed far less stilted than during the four times that Alter had formally interviewed Clinton.

Perhaps it was mere coincidence, but after the off-the-record meeting, Alter hailed the president in *Newsweek* as “the salesman with the best understanding of women” and “the creator of a new kind of values politics. . . . Clinton’s first important insight—confirmed by his constant reading of polls—is that Americans are not nearly as divided as we sometimes think. . . .

“We mostly missed a big story sitting right under our noses, one of the great acts of political theft in recent memory. In 1996, Bill Clinton—that’s right, BILL CLINTON—grabbed family values for the Democrats, and he’s not about to give them back.”

Seib cast his *Wall Street Journal* column as an exercise in mind reading. “If you’re President Clinton, here’s how you might see things this holiday season. . . . What is to be your legacy? Perhaps it lies in being the Baby Boomer who saves entitlement programs for the Baby Boomers as they head toward retirement. . . . Maybe you try some small confidence-building measures before attempting any big fix.” Readers never suspected that the columnists had gotten their information from a certain inside source.

But McCurry was interested in more than just a couple of favorable columns. He wanted Clinton to see journalists in what he called a “defanged mode,” not peppering him with prosecutorial questions. McCurry’s fantasy was that POTUS, as White House aides called the president of the United States, could have sessions like this with Howell Raines, the editorial page editor of *The New York Times*, and Leonard Downie, executive editor of *The Washington Post*, who would see, in an easygoing atmosphere, that Clinton was a thoughtful guy.

The biggest complaint among White House reporters was how remote they felt from the man they were supposed to be covering. McCurry agreed that this was a problem. When the campaign was over he arranged a get-acquainted session between Clinton and seven of the new correspondents who would be covering him in the second term. They gathered in the Map Room, whose wall is adorned by the 1945 military map that hung there when FDR left the White House for the last time. Clinton, nursing a sore throat, slouched on the couch sipping tea. He told the reporters, who munched cookies on the chairs around him, that they would have to do most of the talking. Then, of course, he held forth for an hour and ten minutes.

Clinton was surprisingly candid, and the chat ranged from whether he and his wife would adopt a child—they had decided against it—to his view of Steve Stockman, the far-right Texan congressman. “He’s crazy,” Clinton said.

That session was also off-the-record. Soon afterward, the seven reporters got together and compared the notes they had hastily scribbled after the meeting. Karen Tumulty of *Time* magazine wanted to use an anecdote about Madeleine Albright. Peter Baker of *The Washington Post* wanted to cite a comment Clinton had made about his old pal James Carville. McCurry finally cut a deal in which seven items could be used without attributing them to Clinton. The reporters could say “the president has told friends . . .” or “the president is known to believe . . .”

Reporters didn’t like the off-the-record rule, since they had to beg for each usable crumb. But McCurry felt it was best that Clinton be able to sound off without

weighing each word. He had not forgotten the infamous "funk" episode of 1995, when the president, in jeans and cowboy boots, had a forty-five minute chat with reporters aboard Air Force One about the mood of the country. The conversation was going fine until Clinton declared that he wanted to "get people out of their funk."

The pack quickly pounced. Clinton was widely ridiculed for his assessment of the national disposition, which was likened to Jimmy Carter's disastrous "malaise" speech in 1979.

"See, this is what happens," Clinton told his staff. "You try to let people understand what you are thinking and what your motivations are, and it just becomes a game of gotcha."

Senior White House officials chastised McCurry for putting the president in such a vulnerable position, and he considered it his greatest blunder as press secretary. But he didn't want to shut off all informal communication. Six months later, when Clinton was returning from a trip to Israel on Air Force One, McCurry tried again, this time decreeing that the conversation was on something called "psych background," meaning that reporters could pretend to tap into the president's brain without attributing any comments to the Big Guy. Clinton rambled for three hours about the Middle East, the Bible, the college basketball playoffs, violence on television, even the peach cobbler aboard the flight, all without saying anything inflammatory. But the exercise was so transparent that it came off as silly. John Harris of *The Washington Post* attributed the remarks to "a talkative and opinionated fellow" on the plane who was "intimately familiar with the thinking of Clinton."

Still, the president seemed to be growing more comfortable with the give-and-take. Flying back from Little Rock on the day after the election, he fell into a free-wheeling conversation with print reporters on the plane. But nothing was ever simple in dealing with the press. The television and radio correspondents quickly complained to McCurry that the session did them no good because they had no usable videotape or sound. McCurry pondered the situation for a moment.

"Come up to the front of the plane," he said. "We'll re-create the moment. You can ask the same questions." In a remarkable bit of staging, the cameramen gathered around the president while the reporters asked the same questions that had been asked moments before, eliciting the same answers. Then one reporter slipped in an extra question and McCurry got mad.

McCurry could give as good as he got, and when he didn't want to answer a question, he could stonewall with the best of them. Deborah Orin found this out the hard way.

The feisty *New York Post* reporter with the jet-black hair and tabloid-tough manner had known McCurry for fifteen years and liked him, most of the time. But she couldn't stand the way he dealt with her from the podium. If he didn't want to address a sensitive question, he would deflect it, duck it, dismiss it. He would needle the person who asked it. What he wouldn't do was provide a straight answer.

It was "an attempt to marginalize reporters who asked embarrassing questions," Orin said later. She took the briefings seriously. Orin was naturally combative, but it was more than that. The daily encounter was a chance to hold the

White House accountable, one of the few public opportunities to challenge the official line.

Many of the veterans considered the briefings stupefyingly dull, a colossal waste of time. CBS's Rita Braver skipped them whenever possible. Brit Hume, the long-time ABC correspondent, would stand up and leave if the droning went on too long. At other times Hume would sit in his booth at the back of the pressroom and listen with one ear to the closed-circuit monitor. If he heard something that annoyed him, he would come loping up to the front and interrogate McCurry, just to show him that the reporters were still awake. But with McCurry slinging so much bull from the podium, it hardly seemed worth the bother. If he uttered any newsworthy syllables, the reporters could read the transcript on their computer screens within minutes.

Orin worked for a conservative newspaper that delighted in Clinton sex scandals, and in the summer of 1996, the scandal of the moment involved Gary Aldrich's book, *Unlimited Access*. A former FBI agent assigned to the White House, Aldrich had written a screed that depicted the Clintonites as sloppy, rude, drug-addled Deadheads. The first headlines, gleefully trumpeted by the *New York Post* (which serialized the book), had Clinton sneaking out under a blanket in the back seat of a car for late-night trysts at the downtown Marriott. It was, as it turned out, a fourth-hand rumor that no one could corroborate.

The White House assumed a full War Room footing in an effort to discredit the book. George Stephanopoulos called every reporter he knew, arguing that the book was tabloid trash, riddled with errors and beneath the dignity of any serious news organization. Stephanopoulos and Mark Fabiani, the White House lawyer in charge of scandal management, went to the ABC bureau a few blocks from the White House and urged producers there to bump Aldrich from a scheduled Sunday appearance on *This Week with David Brinkley*. Leon Panetta called Bob Murphy, ABC's vice president for news, with the same message.

McCurry, traveling with the president in Lyons, France, pulled aside Robin Sproul, ABC's Washington bureau chief, and launched into a red-faced tirade. He was really hot. There would be consequences if ABC put Aldrich on the air, he said. The network's requests to talk to the president would be dropped, including Clinton's planned interview with Barbara Walters that fall, McCurry warned. White House officials might be reluctant to appear on ABC programs. When the Brinkley show put Aldrich on anyway—along with Stephanopoulos—McCurry said that ABC had “damaged” the president. “We'll remember that,” he said. Stephanopoulos even made the ludicrous claim that Bob Dole's campaign was involved, since Craig Shirley, a conservative publicist who had once done volunteer work for the Dole camp, was helping to promote the book.

Though the administration's counterattack didn't scare ABC, it did help to turn the rest of the establishment media against the Aldrich book. After the book's numerous errors and rumors were exposed by the Brinkley show, *Newsweek*, and other news organizations, *Larry King Live* and *Dateline NBC* both dropped planned interviews with Aldrich. And while *Unlimited Access* went on to become a best-seller—ballyhooed as *The Book the Clinton White House Doesn't Want You to Read*—the assault had sent an important signal. The Clintonites were willing to use intimidation tactics to quash an unfavorable story. If journal-

ists found them too heavy-handed, well, that was a price they had to pay to neutralize the book. McCurry later apologized to Robin Sproul, but he had clearly shown his willingness to use the brass knuckles.

Still, Orin believed that there was legitimate material in Aldrich's book, incidents that the ex-FBI man would be in a position to know. He had written that Craig Livingstone, a mid-level White House aide who later resigned for improperly obtaining FBI files on Republicans, had once issued a memo chastising White House staffers for writing bad checks. What about that? Either there was a memo or there wasn't. Orin soon pressed McCurry at the gaggle, but he deflected the question. A few days later she tried again to ask about "some of the charges made by Gary Aldrich."

"Still trying to resurrect him, huh?" McCurry shot back.

Orin pressed on: Was there a Craig Livingstone memo on bad checks? True or not?

"I am not going to check, because most of what he writes in that book has already been proven to be without merit," McCurry said.

"If it's not true, why don't you want to check it?"

"I don't think it's worth my time to check."

A CBS producer, Mark Knoller, piped up. "But Deborah's question is legitimate, isn't it, Mike?"

The book, McCurry told Orin, was "filled with lies. And your newspaper, as I recall, reprinted large portions of it."

"And it printed your denials, Mike. But the question is a question about a memo. Did or didn't he issue such a memo?"

"I do not know."

"Will you check?"

"No."

Why not?

"Because I don't want to," McCurry said. Then he threw down the gauntlet: "Does any other news organization want to pose the question?"

It was a tense moment. McCurry was suddenly the playground bully, challenging the rest of the gang to stand up for Deborah Orin. There was an uncomfortable silence. "Okay, hearing none, any other questions?" McCurry said. Another reporter asked about a Pentagon initiative, and the briefing moved on.

Orin felt humiliated. Her whole body was shaking. Afterward, several reporters approached her and apologized for their behavior. "They felt as if their balls had been cut off while my limb was cut off," Orin said later. "The press corps was totally emasculated."

One reporter told her, "I didn't want to use up any chits for your story." Orin was stunned. The dirty little secret of covering the White House, she felt, was there wasn't much that McCurry and his colleagues would do to help you. Oh, you might get an early leak on some budget proposal or presidential appointment, but by and large everyone, whether in favor or not, was fed the same thin gruel. And most of the reporters would not stick their necks out and risk losing what little access they had. They had become too passive. McCurry, she realized, was winning the war. ■

Times. The others are too busy with their accountants and tax lawyers. We sleep. Oh, a few eccentrics raise a paranoid cry of Conspiracy. But nothing breaks the somnolence. We are, it seems, as Lincoln Steffens found Philadelphia, corrupt and content. . . .

There is no story—literally none—which the great electronic news media and the billion-dollar press aggregates cannot extract, be it from the Kremlin or the Pentagon, and bring to the public of America. Instead, they tinker with sitcoms and fourcolor ad pages. Priorities? Forget it.

72

LARRY SABATO

From *Feeding Frenzy*

When political scientist Larry Sabato published his 1991 book on the media's role in campaigning, he gave a term to a phenomenon others had already seen: a feeding frenzy. The press en masse attacks a wounded politician whose record—or more accurately, his or her character—has been questioned. Every network and cable station participates, often without any real evidence to back up the rumor. Sabato's list of thirty-six examples ends in 1990; knowledgeable readers will be able to update the list. Paradoxically, the spectacular success of the Washington Post's Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in investigating Watergate set the stage for recent feeding frenzies. Today, just the fear of being a media target may deter many qualified people from entering public service, Sabato notes.

IT HAS BECOME a spectacle without equal in modern American politics: the news media, print and broadcast, go after a wounded politician like sharks in a feeding frenzy. The wounds may have been self-inflicted, and the politician may richly deserve his or her fate, but the journalists now take center stage in the process, creating the news as much as reporting it, changing both the shape of election-year politics and the contours of government. Having replaced the political parties as the screening committee for candidates and officeholders, the media propel some politicians toward power and unceremoniously eliminate others. Unavoidably, this enormously influential role—and the news practices employed in exercising it—has provided rich fodder for a multitude of press critics.

These critics' charges against the press cascade down with the fury of

80

rain in a summer squall. Public officials and many other observers see journalists as rude, arrogant, and cynical, given to exaggeration, harassment, sensationalism, and gross insensitivity. . . .

Press invasion of privacy is leading to the gradual erasure of the line protecting a public person's purely private life. This makes the price of public life enormously higher, serving as an even greater deterrent for those not absolutely obsessed with holding power—the kind of people we ought least to want in office. Rather than recognizing this unfortunate consequence, many in journalism prefer to relish their newly assumed role of “gatekeeper,” which, as mentioned earlier, enables them to substitute for party leaders in deciding which characters are virtuous enough to merit consideration for high office. As ABC News correspondent Brit Hume self-critically suggests:

We don't see ourselves institutionally, collectively anymore as a bunch of journalists out there faithfully reporting what's happening day by day. . . . We have a much grander view of ourselves: we are the Horatio at the national bridge. We are the people who want to prevent the bad characters from crossing over into public office.

Hume's veteran ABC colleague Sander Vanocur agrees, detecting “among some young reporters a quality of the avenging angel: they are going to sanitize American politics.” More and more, the news media seem determined to show that would-be emperors have no clothes, and if necessary to prove the point, they personally will strip the candidates naked on the campaign trail. The sheer number of journalists participating in these public denudings guarantees riotous behavior, and the “full-court press” almost always presents itself as a snarling, unruly mob more bent on killing kings than making them. Not surprisingly potential candidates deeply fear the power of an inquisitorial press, and in deciding whether to seek office, they often consult journalists as much as party leaders, even sharing private vulnerabilities with newsmen to gauge reaction. The *Los Angeles Times's* Washington bureau chief, Jack Nelson, had such an encounter before the 1988 campaign season, when a prospective presidential candidate “literally asked me how long I thought the statute of limitations was” for marital infidelity. “I told him I didn't know, but I didn't think [the limit] had been reached in his case!” For whatever reasons, the individual chose not to run.

As the reader will see later in this volume, able members of the news corps offer impressive defenses for all the practices mentioned thus far, not the least of which is that the press has become more aggressive to combat the legions of image makers, political consultants, spin doctors,

and handlers who surround modern candidates like a nearly impenetrable shield. Yet upon reflection, most news veterans recognize that press excesses are not an acceptable antidote for consultant or candidate evils. In fact, not one of the interviewed journalists even attempted to justify an increasingly frequent occurrence in news organizations: the publication of gossip and rumor *without convincing proof*. Gossip has always been the drug of choice for journalists as well as the rest of the political community, but as the threshold for publication of information about private lives has been lowered, journalists sometimes cover politics as “Entertainment Tonight” reporters cover Hollywood. A bitter Gary Hart* observed: “Rumor and gossip have become the coins of the political realm,” and the *New York Times's* Michael Oreskes seemed to agree: “1988 was a pretty sorry year when the *National Enquirer* was the most important publication in American journalism.” With all the stories and innuendo about personal vice, campaigns appear to be little more than a stream of talegates (or in the case of sexual misadventures, tailgates).

The sorry standard set on the campaign trail is spilling over into coverage of governmental battles. Ever since Watergate,† government scandals have paraded across the television set in a roll call so lengthy and numbing that they are inseparable in the public consciousness, all joined at the Achilles' heel. Some recent lynchings such as John Tower's failure to be confirmed as secretary of defense,‡ rival any spectacle produced by colonial Salem. At the same time more vital and revealing information is ignored or crowded off the agenda. *Real* scandals, such as the savings-and-loan heist or the influence peddling at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1980s, go undetected for years. The sad conclusion is inescapable: The press has become obsessed with gossip rather than governance; it prefers to employ titillation rather than scrutiny; as a result, its political coverage produces trivialization rather than enlightenment. And the dynamic mechanism propelling and demonstrating this decline in news standards is the “feeding frenzy.” . . .

*Former Senator (D-Col.) Gary Hart's 1988 presidential candidacy ended after media revelations about his extramarital relations with Donna Rice.—EDS.

†Watergate began with the 1972 break-in at the Democratic National headquarters by several men associated with President Nixon's re-election committee. Watergate ended two years later with the resignation of President Nixon. Nixon and his closest aides were implicated in the coverage of the Watergate burglary. Tapes made by President Nixon of his Oval Office conversations revealed lying and obstruction of justice at the highest levels of government.—EDS.

‡In 1989, the Senate rejected President Bush's nominee for secretary of defense, former Texas Senator John Tower. Senate hearings produced allegations that Tower was an excessive drinker and a womanizer.—EDS.

The term *frenzy* suggests some kind of disorderly, compulsive, or agitated activity that is muscular and instinctive, not cerebral and thoughtful. In the animal world, no activity is more classically frenzied than the feeding of sharks, piranhas, or bluefish when they encounter a wounded prey. These attack-fish with extraordinarily acute senses first search out weak, ill, or injured targets. On locating them, each hunter moves in quickly to gain a share of the kill, feeding not just off the victim but also off its fellow hunters' agitation. The excitement and drama of the violent encounter builds to a crescendo, sometimes overwhelming the creatures' usual inhibitions. The frenzy can spread, with the delirious attackers wildly striking any object that moves in the water, even each other. Veteran reporters will recognize more press behavior in this passage than they might wish to acknowledge. This reverse anthropomorphism can be carried too far, but the similarity of piranha in the water and press on the campaign trail can be summed up in a shared goal: If it bleeds, try to kill it.

The kingdom of politics and not of nature is the subject of this volume, so for our purposes, a feeding frenzy is defined as the press coverage attending any political event or circumstance where a critical mass of journalists leap to cover the same embarrassing or scandalous subject and pursue it intensely, often excessively, and sometimes uncontrollably. No precise number of journalists can be attached to the term *critical mass*, but in the video age, we truly know it when we see it; the forest of cameras, lights, microphones, and adrenaline-choked reporters surrounding a Gary Hart, Dan Quayle, or Geraldine Ferraro is unmistakable. [The following table] contains a list of thirty-six events that surely qualify as frenzies. They are occasions of sin for the press as well as the politicians, and thus ideal research sites that will serve as case studies for this book. A majority (twenty-one) are drawn from presidential politics, while seven examples come from the state and local levels, with the remaining eight focused on government scandals or personal peccadilloes of nationally recognized political figures. . . .

Conditions are always ripe for the spawning of a frenzy in the brave new world of omnipresent journalism. Advances in media technology have revolutionized campaign coverage. Handheld miniature cameras (minicams) and satellite broadcasting have enabled television to go live anywhere, anytime with ease. Instantaneous transmission (by broadcast and fax) to all corners of the country has dramatically increased the velocity of campaign developments today, accelerating events to their conclusion at breakneck speed. Gary Hart, for example, went from front-runner to ex-candidate in less than a week in May 1987. Continuous public-affairs programming, such as C-SPAN and CNN, helps put more

FEEDING FRENZIES: CASE STUDIES USED FOR THIS BOOK

From Presidential Politics

- 1952 Richard Nixon's "secret fund"
- 1968 George Romney's "brainwashing" about Vietnam
- 1968 Spiro Agnew's "fat jap" flap
- 1969 Ted Kennedy's Chappaquiddick
- 1972 Edmund Muskie's New Hampshire cry
- 1972 Thomas Eagleton's mental health
- 1976 Jimmy Carter's "lust in the heart" *Playboy* interview
- 1976 Gerald Ford's "free Poland" gaffe
- 1979 Jimmy Carter's "killer rabbit"
- 1980 Billygate (Billy Carter and Libya)
- 1983 Debategate (Reagan's use of Carter's debate briefing books)
- 1984 Gary Hart's age, name, and signature changes
- 1984 Jesse Jackson's "Hymietown" remark
- 1984 Geraldine Ferraro's family finances
- 1985/86 Jack Kemp's purported homosexuality
- 1987 Gary Hart and Donna Rice
- 1987 Joseph Biden's plagiarism and Michael Dukakis's "attack video"
- 1987 Pat Robertson's exaggerated résumé and shotgun marriage
- 1988 Dukakis's mental health
- 1988 Dan Quayle (National Guard service, Paula Parkinson, academic record, rumors such as plagiarism and drugs)
- 1988 George Bush's alleged mistress

From the State and Local Levels

- 1987/88 Governor Evan Mecham on the impeachment trail (Arizona)
- 1987/88 Chuck Robb and the cocaine parties (Virginia)
- 1983/90 Mayor Marion Barry's escapades (District of Columbia)
- 1987 Governor Dick Celeste's womanizing (Ohio)
- 1988 Mayor Henry Cisneros's extramarital affair (San Antonio, Texas)
- 1989/90 Governor Gaston Caperton's "soap opera" divorce (West Virginia)
- 1990 Texas governor's election: drugs, rape, and "honey hunts"

Noncampaign Examples

- 1973/74 The Watergate scandals
- 1974 Congressman Wilbur Mills and stripper Fanne Foxe
- 1986/87 The Iran-Contra affair
- 1987 Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg's marijuana use (and campaign repercussions)
- 1989 John Tower's losing fight to become secretary of defense
- 1989 Speaker Jim Wright's fall from power
- 1989 Tom Foley's rocky rise to the Speakership
- 1989/90 Barney Frank and the male prostitute

of a politician's utterances on the record, as Senator Joseph Biden discovered to his chagrin when C-SPAN unobtrusively taped Biden's exaggeration of his résumé at a New Hampshire kaffeeklatsch in 1987. (This became a contributing piece of the frenzy that brought Biden down.) C-SPAN, CNN, and satellite broadcasting capability also contribute to the phenomenon called "the news cycle without end," which creates a voracious news appetite demanding to be fed constantly, increasing the pressure to include marginal bits of information and gossip and producing novel if distorting "angles" on the same news to differentiate one report from another. The extraordinary number of local stations covering national politics today—up to several hundred at major political events—creates an echo chamber producing seemingly endless repetitions of essentially the same news stories. This local contingent also swells the corps traveling the campaign trail. In 1988 an estimated two thousand journalists of all stripes flooded the Iowa caucuses, for instance. Reporters not infrequently outnumber participants at meetings and whistestops. . . .

Whether on the rise or not, the unfortunate effects of pack journalism are apparent to both news reporters and news consumers: conformity, homogeneity, and formulaic reporting. Innovation is discouraged, and the checks and balances supposedly provided by competition evaporate. Press energies are devoted to finding mere variations on a theme (new angles and wiggle disclosures), while a mob psychology catches hold that allows little mercy for the frenzy victim. CNN's Frank Sesno captures the pack mood perfectly:

I've been in that group psychology; I know what it's like. You think you're on to something, you've got somebody on the run. How dare they not come clean? How dare they not tell the full story? What are they trying to hide? Why are they hiding it? And you become a crusader for the truth. Goddammit, you're going to get the truth! . . .

Sesno's crusader spirit can be traced directly to the lingering effects of the Watergate scandal, which had the most profound impact of any modern event on the manner and substance of the press's conduct. In many respects Watergate began the press's open season on politicians in a chain reaction that today allows for scrutiny of even the most private sanctuums of public officials' lives. Moreover, coupled with Vietnam and the civil rights movement, Watergate shifted the orientation of journalism away from mere description—providing an accurate account of happenings—and toward prescription—helping to set the campaign's (and society's) agendas by focusing attention on the candidates' shortcomings as well as certain social problems.

A new breed and a new generation of reporters were attracted to journalism, and particularly its investigative arm. As a group they were idealistic, though aggressively mistrustful of all authority, and they shared a contempt for "politics as usual." Critics called them do-gooders and purists who wanted the world to stand at moral attention for them. Twenty years later the Vietnam and Watergate generation dominates journalism: They and their younger cohorts hold sway over most newsrooms, with two-thirds of all reporters now under the age of thirty-six and an ever-increasing share of editors and executives drawn from the Watergate-era class. Of course, many of those who found journalism newly attractive in the wake of Watergate were not completely altruistic. The ambitious saw the happy fate of the *Washington Post's* young Watergate sleuths Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who gained fame and fortune, not to mention big-screen portrayals by Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman in the movie *All the President's Men*. As *U.S. News & World Report's* Steven Roberts sees it:

A lot of reporters run around this town dreaming of the day that Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford are going to play them in the movies. That movie had more effect on the self-image of young journalists than anything else. Christ! Robert Redford playing a journalist? It lends an air of glamour and excitement that acts as a magnet drawing young reporters to investigative reporting.

The young were attracted not just to journalism but to a particular *kind* of journalism. The role models were not respected, established reporters but two unknowns who refused to play by the rules their seniors had accepted. "Youngsters learned that deductive techniques, all guesswork, and lots of unattributed information [were] the royal road to fame, even if it wasn't being terribly responsible," says Robert Novak. After all, adds columnist Mark Shields, "Robert Redford didn't play Walter Lippmann and Dustin Hoffman didn't play Joseph Kraft." (Kraft, like Lippmann, had a long and distinguished career in journalism.) . . .

A clear consequence of Watergate and other recent historical events was the increasing emphasis placed by the press on the character of candidates. As journalists reviewed the three tragic but exceptionally capable figures who had held the presidency since 1960, they saw that the failures of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon were not those of intellect but of ethos. Chappaquiddick, Spiro Agnew, and the Eagleton affair reinforced that view. The party affiliations and ideology of these disappointing leaders varied, but in common they possessed defects of personality, constitution, and disposition. In the world of journalism (or academe), as few as two data points can constitute a trend; these six together constituted an irrefutable

mother lode of proof. "We in the press learned from experience that character flaws could have very large costs," says David Broder, "and we couldn't afford to ignore them if we were going to meet our responsibility." . . .

[A] troubling consequence of modern media coverage for the political system has to do with the recruitment of candidates and public servants. Simply put, the price of power has been raised dramatically, far too high for many outstanding potential officeholders. An individual contemplating a run for office must now accept the possibility of almost unlimited intrusion into his or her financial and personal life. Every investment made, every affair conducted, every private sin committed from college years to the present may one day wind up in a headline or on television. For a reasonably sane and moderately sensitive person, this is a daunting realization, with potentially hurtful results not just for the candidate but for his or her immediate family and friends. To have achieved a nongovernmental position of respect and honor in one's community is a source of pride and security, and the risk that it could all be destroyed by an unremitting and distorted assault on one's faults and foibles cannot be taken lightly. American society today is losing the services of many exceptionally talented individuals who could make outstanding contributions to the commonweal, but who understandably will not subject themselves and their loved ones to abusive, intrusive press coverage. Of course, this problem stems as much from the attitudes of the public as from those of the press; the strain of moral absolutism in portions of the American people merely finds expression in the relentless press frenzies and ethicsgate hunts. . . . *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis is surely correct when he suggests, "If we tell people there's to be absolutely nothing private left to them, then we will tend to attract to public office only those most brazen, least sensitive personalities. Is that what we want to do?"

73

HOWARD KURTZ

From Spin Cycle

During much of Bill Clinton's second term, rumor and scandal dogged the president. Some Americans believed the accusations and some did not. Some thought them relevant to the running of the executive branch; others did not. The White House responded to the media barrage by trying to influence the press's coverage. That's called spin, and journalist Howard Kurtz portrays



Chapter 7

The Media

A free and unbridled press is one of the safeguards of American liberty. The United States, as Supreme Court Justice William Brennan wrote in 1964, has maintained a "profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open." The press plays a critical role in promoting democracy by exposing official mismanagement and corruption, providing data on which citizens can make key decisions, and generally providing the people with a window on the activities of their government and the government with feedback on the opinions and viewpoints of the people.

The role of the media in the United States today, however, is not so simple. The media not only reports the news; it also decides what is and what is not news. It not only reports on public opinion; it also plays a vital role in shaping public opinion. In theory, the media may be free and unencumbered, but journalists live and work in a complex environment: their employers are themselves large corporations, which depend on other larger corporations for necessary advertising revenue; they have their own agendas to pursue, both professionally and, some would say, ideologically; they must both entertain and inform, especially on television; they are easily manipulated and used by government officials and candidates; they must cope with short deadlines and often with limited information; and they must continually try to fight off boredom, bias, and a pack mentality.

All of this is complicated by television, which has become the dominant medium in the United States. More Americans get their news on television than in any other form. Campaigns are waged and the country is governed through media performances, sound bites, and photo opportunities. Understanding television and knowing how to use it can get a candidate elected and help him or her govern; consider, for example, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Failing to project the right media image can ruin both a candidate and a president, as an endless trail of defeated politicians could easily testify.

This chapter focuses on three key themes. Selection 7.1 examines the constitutional commitment to freedom of the press through the prism of *New York Times v. United States*, a 1971 Supreme Court decision that refused to allow government censorship of the media, even when national security was arguably at stake. Selections 7.2 and 7.3 investigate how the news media decide which stories to cover, and how to cover them, the first selection by looking at the Monica Lewinsky affair, the second by examining how the media cover foreign news. Finally, selection 7.4 provides an insight into the un-

easy relationship between the White House press corps and the president's press secretary, who must maintain credibility with the media even while "spinning" the news to the advantage of the president.

Chapter Questions

1. What roles do the media play in American politics? How do these roles conflict with one another or with the economic, personal, or professional interests of journalists or with the interests of the corporations for which most of them work?
2. What influences the media's decisions on what news to report and how to report it? To what extent do the media control the agenda in American politics? To what extent are the media manipulated by politicians and government officials?



Foundations

The media's critical role in the American political system is grounded in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which protects both freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The American commitment to a free press can be traced back as far as 1735, when the printer John Peter Zenger was acquitted by a New York jury, even though he admitted to violating the law by publishing criticisms of the colonial government. It was not until the twentieth century, however, that the Supreme Court translated that commitment into legally enforceable doctrine.

The media are not at liberty to publish or broadcast anything they want, of course. Newspapers can still be sued for libel, which involves the publication of false statements damaging to the reputation of an individual or organization, although the rules laid down by the Supreme Court make it difficult for public officials and public figures to win such suits. The broadcast media are more heavily regulated, with television and radio stations subjected to licensing requirements and to rules prohibiting or limiting certain kinds of speech, including sexually explicit materials. In general, however, the American press remains remarkably free from governmental control or interference.

One of the Supreme Court's landmark decisions on press freedom was the 1971 case of *New York Times Co. v. United States*. The case arose when the *Times* began to publish the so-called Pentagon Papers, a series of secret documents concerning the Vietnam War. Citing national security considerations, the Nixon administration immediately went to court, asking a federal judge for an injunction (or order) forcing the newspaper to cease publication of the papers. The judge agreed, at least until the issue could be resolved by the courts. Meanwhile, several other newspapers—including the Washington Post—began publishing the papers and joined the lawsuit. Within a matter of weeks, the matter was argued before the Supreme Court, which threw out the lower court order by a vote of six to three, clearing the way for publication.

There was no majority opinion in the case. Instead, eight justices submitted separate opinions. The opinion of Justice Hugo Black, which was joined by Justice William O. Douglas, is a passionate and eloquent statement by one of the First Amendment's strongest supporters. Black's opinion underscores the importance of a free press in any democratic society.

Questions

1. What was the purpose of the First Amendment, according to Black? Why is a free press, in his view, essential to the creation and maintenance of a free society?
 2. Why does Black reject the Nixon administration's argument that the injunctions in this case were justified by considerations of national security?
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7.1 *New York Times v. United States* (1971)

Justice Hugo C. Black

I adhere to the view that the Government's case against the Washington Post should have been dismissed and that the injunction against the New York Times should have been vacated without oral argument when the cases were first presented to this Court. I believe that every moment's continuance of the injunctions against these newspapers amounts to a flagrant, indefensible, and continuing violation of the First Amendment. . . . In my view it is unfortunate that some of my Brethren are apparently willing to hold that the publication of news may sometimes be enjoined. Such a holding would make a shambles of the First Amendment.

Our Government was launched in 1789 with the adoption of the Constitution. The Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment, followed in 1791. Now, for the first time in the 182 years since the founding of the Republic, the federal courts are asked to hold that the First Amendment does not mean what it says, but rather means that the Government can halt the publication of current news of vital importance to the people of this country.

In seeking injunctions against these newspapers and in its presentation to the Court, the Executive Branch seems to have forgotten the essential purpose and history of the First Amendment. When the Constitution was adopted, many people strongly opposed it because the document contained no Bill of Rights to safeguard certain basic freedoms. They especially feared that the new powers granted to a central government might be interpreted to permit the government to curtail freedom of religion, press, assembly, and speech. In response to an overwhelming public clamor, James Madison offered a series of amendments to satisfy citizens

that these great liberties would remain safe and beyond the power of government to abridge. Madison proposed what later became the First Amendment in three parts, two of which are set out below, and one of which proclaimed: "The people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable." The amendments were offered to curtail and restrict the general powers granted to the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches two years before in the original Constitution. The Bill of Rights changed the original Constitution into a new charter under which no branch of government could abridge the people's freedoms of press, speech, religion, and assembly. . . . Madison and the other Framers of the First Amendment, able men that they were, wrote in language they earnestly believed could never be misunderstood: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom . . . of the press. . . ." Both the history and language of the First Amendment support the view that the press must be left free to publish news, whatever the source, without censorship, injunctions, or prior restraints.

In the First Amendment the Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The Government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people. Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government. And paramount among the responsibilities of a free press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell. In my view, far from deserving condemnation for their courageous reporting, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other newspapers should be commended for serving the purpose that the Founding Fathers saw so clearly. In revealing the workings of government that led to the Vietnam war, the newspapers nobly did precisely that which the Founders hoped and trusted they would do.

The Government's case here is based on premises entirely different from those that guided the Framers of the First Amendment. The Solicitor General [on behalf of the U.S. government] has carefully and emphatically stated:

Now, Mr. Justice [BLACK], your construction of . . . [the First Amendment] is well known, and I certainly respect it. You say that no law means no law, and that should be obvious. I can only say, Mr. Justice, that to me it is equally obvious that "no law" does not mean "no law," and I would seek to persuade the Court that is true. . . . [T]here are other parts of the Constitution that grant powers and responsibilities to the Executive, and . . . the First Amendment was not intended to make it impossible for the Executive to function or to protect the security of the United States.

And the Government argues in its brief that in spite of the First Amendment, "[t]he authority of the Executive Department to protect the nation against publication of information whose disclosure would endanger the national security stems from two interrelated sources: the constitutional power of the President over the conduct of foreign affairs and his authority as Commander-in-Chief."

In other words, we are asked to hold that despite the First Amendment's emphatic command, the Executive Branch, the Congress, and the Judiciary can make laws enjoining publication of current news and abridging freedom of the press in the name of "national security." The Government does not even attempt to rely on any act of Congress. Instead it makes the bold and dangerously far-reaching contention that the courts should take it upon themselves to "make" a law abridging freedom of the press in the name of equity, presidential power and national security, even when the representatives of the people in Congress have adhered to the command of the First Amendment and refused to make such a law. To find that the President has "inherent power" to halt the publication of news by resort to the courts would wipe out the First Amendment and destroy the fundamental liberty and security of the very people the Government hopes to make "secure." No one can read the history of the adoption of the First Amendment without being convinced beyond any doubt that it was injunctions like those sought here that Madison and his collaborators intended to outlaw in this Nation for all time.

The word "security" is a broad, vague generality whose contours should not be invoked to abrogate the fundamental law embodied in the First Amendment. The guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of informed representative government provides no real security for our Republic. The Framers of the First Amendment, fully aware of both the need to defend a new nation and the abuses of the English and Colonial governments, sought to give this new society strength and security by providing that freedom of speech, press, religion, and assembly should not be abridged. This thought was eloquently expressed in 1937 by Mr. Chief Justice Hughes—great man and great Chief Justice that he was—when the Court held a man could not be punished for attending a meeting run by Communists.

The greater the importance of safeguarding the community from incitements to the overthrow of our institutions by force and violence, the more imperative is the need to preserve inviolate the constitutional rights of free speech, free press and free assembly in order to maintain the opportunity for free political discussion, to the end that government may be responsive to the will of the people and that changes, if desired, may be obtained by peaceful means. Therein lies the security of the Republic, the very foundation of constitutional government. ■



American Politics Today

The Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky story obsessed the American media for more than a year. But the presidential sex scandal was more than just a major news story; as John Cassidy argues, it also became a major business. The media's economic interest in reporting the story underscores the fact that the American media is dominated by for-profit corporations and provides a revealing look into the realities of the media marketplace.