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THE MEDIA IN THE 1992 CAMPAIGN

THE NO LONGER IMPERIAL MEDIA

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After every presidential election since at least 1952 widespread attention has been centered on the role played by the news media in shaping the course of the campaign. Perhaps the most burning issue addressed in these political post-mortems is whether media coverage of the candidates affected the outcome of the presidential race. If there is an iron law in presidential politics --- a surmise that the results of each election seems to challenge --- it is that the losers in the quadrennial contest for the presidency will inevitably charge that their defeat was shaped or even caused by the insidious bias of large portions of the media against their candidacy. In January of 1993, months after his defeat in the 1992 campaign, President Bush complained to American troops in Somalia about the unfair way in which the media had treated him..

In our view, the 1992 campaign differed from these earlier contests. Historians may well mark 1992 as the year in which media power in presidential politics greatly declined. One striking aspect of media coverage of this election

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was the great disparity that prevailed throughout that struggle between the agenda of the media and the agenda of the voters. What may be described as the pluralization of the media has significantly reduced the ability of any single set of news organizations like the television networks to shape the dialogue in a presidential campaign. This development allowed presidential candidates to steer the campaign agenda toward issues of their choice rather than those of the reporters who covered them.

Two factors seem to us to be of central importance to an understanding of the particulars and peculiarities of the media's role in the 1992 presidential campaign.

I. <u>THE DECLINE OF THE CHARACTER ISSUE.</u> News organizations focused a great deal of attention on the allegedly dubious aspects of the characters of the two challengers. However, when the votes were counted, both Clinton and Perot not only survived but emerged triumphant in spite of all the negative coverage had received on the character issue.

II. <u>THE DECLINE IN INFLUENCE ON THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NATIONAL NEWS MEDIA.</u> In 1992, the candidates discovered that they could free themselves from the boundaries established by mainstream print, television, and broadcast media through appearances on tabloid television programs, infomercials, and televised town meetings. These formats

provide communication with voters without the editing and reformatting of the regular corps of political correspondents. Candidates found that they had more ability there to control the manner in which they were presented. These programs were more likely to display the candidates in a manner that they rather than the news organizations chose. At the same time campaign organizations, particular President Bush and his operatives, seemed mesmerized by the proliferating number of journalistic talk shows that they watched almost as attentively as the polls.

Of course many of the aspects of media coverage of the 1992 campaign indicate the continuities in the evolution of relations between campaign organizations and news organizations. In our analysis we will look first at the consequences for the relationship of the failure of the character issue to take with the voters. We will then look at the evolving patterns in the relationship that led to the end of the dominance of the networks and major national publications.

THE CHARACTER ISSUE

The image the public received of the candidates over the past third of a century had been largely one sent to them through the refracting lens of the media. News organizations determined what was important about a candidate.

The "news" presented stories based on the view of the campaign that reporters and editors deemed important. During the campaigns of the 1980s, important news organizations concluded that character rather than policy proposals or platforms provided the best predictor of how a candidate will behave as President. There are a number of explanations for this phenomena, chief among them was the response of journalists to the legacy of Vietnam and Watergate. While Americans, including their news organizations, do not have long memories, the collective memory of the presidencies of Johnson and Nixon played an important part in journalists coverage of later campaigns.

The character issue *reached the height of its importance in 1988. That year, The New York Times* sent out a long questionnaire to all candidates in which they asked them to list every place or residence, every friend, every place of employment, and even to release their FBI reports for examination According to Martin Tolchin of *The Times,* "we decided that Barber was right. That we would learn more about a candidate by observing and analyzing his personality than we could by looking at the public statements or public images, both of which are carefully constructed and could mask the real person."[2]

From the onset of the 1992 campaign, the major news organization representing print and television centered their attention on the issue of personal character. This focus reflected the experience of news organization

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[2]Martin Tolchin speaking at the National Capital Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., April, 1988.

in past presidential contests, when the campaigns of candidates like Gary Hart and Joe Biden were beset and eventually derailed as a result of what were ostensibly question of character -- in Hart's case the charge of womanizing and in Biden's case the issue of plagiarism in a campaign speech. character issues played an important role in 1988. Among the Democrats, two in particular failed badly. Hart challenged news organizations to follow him if they thought he was having affairs with women. The Miami Herald took up the challenge and found the evidence to back up their suspicions. Senator Joe Biden also fell afoul of the character question. After the media revealed that he had made false claims about his academic record and plagiarized a speech, he took himself out of the race.

Stories about a candidates record or his thinking on policy issues also are produced as each prospective nominee announces his intentions, but the character issues dominates the news after the initial summary pieces. for some time. There are perfectly valid journalistic reasons for this. Prior to their runs for the presidency, candidates have at most regional identification. The voters do not know most candidates on a national level unless the person has previously run for president, such as Gore in this campaign. Reporting on character, especially over long periods of time, results in searches for indications of character flaws. Furthermore, once an individual's character is molded to a certain form by the media, stories about his activities are more likely to appear if they conform to that pattern.

For much of the 1992 campaign, media coverage of Clinton concentrated first on his relationships with women other than his wife, particularly Jeffnifer Flowers, and then in unrelenting efforts to force Clinton to come up with a better explanation of his draft record during the Vietnam war. Only when the presidential debates took place at the end of the 1992 presidential contest did the media finally grasp the fact that character was not to be the make or break issue this time around. Only then did it become clear that issues like unemployment and the deficit had reduced the question of character to marginal status as a factor in the campaign.

A similar focus was evident in the media's coverage of the campaign of Ross Perot. It is a truly exceptional event when a candidate running for the presidency of the United States finds himself confronted with doubts in the media about his emotional stability and even perhaps his sanity. Paranoia quickly becomes a staple in media coverage of Perot and his personality during the campaign.

The question which the 1992 presidential election thus poses is whether the issue of character has lost all its salience in presidential elections. In spite of all their alleged defects in personal character, neither Clinton nor Perot seemed to suffer any more than minimal damage from this issue in 1992. As a result, it appears that character tends to recede in importance during a presidential election if it has to compete with issues of deeper significance to

individual voters that are emphasized by candidates with their own channels to these voters.

THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA'S EVOLUTION AND DECLINE IN INFLUENCE

MEDIA INFLUENCE. Although we argue that the impact of media coverage in 1992 was different than it had been in recent campaigns, in most ways news organizations behavior indicates the evolution of developments over the past decades. Throughout the postwar years, changes in the structure, wealth, and technologies available to news organizations worked to increase the influence of the major news organizations on presidential campaigns. Although the balance of power between campaign officials and news organizations remained in favor of the politicos, especially when they controlled the White House and knew how to use its resources, organizations had to influence voters according to the formats provided by the media. Through the late 70s and 1980s campaign functionaries learned to expand their access to voters through computer technology that permitted frequent direct mailings and satellite technology that enabled them to circumvent Washington reporters. Nonetheless, electoral success meant emphasizing the criteria developed by the media.

In the 1960s and 70s, the prosperity of news organizations, increased as they became media conglomerates linking the revenues of television advertising, books, magazines, and other enterprises. Their contemporary styles and

strategies of covering presidential campaigns developed as they enlarged their wealth They were able to assign more staff, acquire new technologies, and develop their resources. Although this process slowed down in the 1980s when retrenchment and restructuring struck media corporations, there is now a far larger media presence in and impact upon the campaign than there was 25 years ago. The increase in the types of media has increased the resources of individual components. News organizations not only receive a great deal of servicing from the campaigns, they get a great deal from each other.

Journalists responded to the 1961 publication of Theodore White's The Making of the President, 1960 by embracing his style of reporting on what had hitherto been regarded as the minutia of campaign strategy. White, who covered the 1956 campaign for TIME later reported that on the final day of the New Hampshire primary in that year only five journalists not from New Hampshire were there. In addition to himself there were two reporters from the wire services, one from a Boston newspaper, and a stringer for The New York Times. In 1980 he counted 450 reporters and 500 technicians working on the final day.[3]

In subsequent campaigns, news organizations assigned increasingly larger numbers of reporters to begin covering and handicapping the campaign from the

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[3]Theodore H. White, *American in Search of Itself: The Making of the President, 1956-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p 27.

New Hampshire primary. By the 1970s. they sent reporter to cover straw polls held in some states the fall before the election year began.

The reforms undertaken by the Democratic Party after their disastrous 1968 Convention increased the need of campaign strategist to use the media as their channel to voters.[4] Especially for Democratic contenders who had to begin the process without White House backing for most of this era, the reforms created a winner-take-little scenario in which secondary and sometimes marginal candidates could continue a public contest. Such fights presented opportunities for news organizations to chart and emphasize candidate blunders to such an extent that avoiding blunders became as important as making points.

In 1992, news organizations also narrowed the field through the images they sketched of the candidates. Senators Bob Kerrey and Tom Harkin, for example, were portrayed as narrowly focused candidates who spoke to farming interests and who had little national appeal. The consequence of such a framing of candidates early in the race is that the only stories that get used are the ones that fit that particular picture. The result was that during the campaign, Senator Kerrey had 8 reporters in his press entourage while Tsongas and Clinton had around 75 each. When Kerrey won the North Dakota primary, his

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[4]See especially Nelson W. Polsby, The News Media as an Alternative to Party in Presidential Selection" in Robert A. Goldwin (ed) *Political Parties in the Eighties (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980) and his longer work* The Consequences of Party Reform (New York: Oxford, 1983)

victory was seen as further evidence of the regional nature of his candidacy and he lost one reporter.

Yet, as the experience of 1992 indicates, there are limits in legitimating candidates. News organizations found it difficult to either crown a particular candidate or knock out another. Early in the campaign, news organizations produced and wrote stories that described Bill Clinton as if he were without serious opposition. Yet that proved not to be the case. Paul Tsongas was able to mount a serious threat to his nomination early in the primary season. At the same time, even though news organizations failed to take Jerry Brown seriously, the voters did. While he was regarded by reporters in their copy as something of a joke, as Cokie Roberts did in her ABC commentary and her National Public Radio pieces, the voters did not share that view. Dan Balz of the Washington Post was one of the first to see the importance of his ability to raise money from the average voter through an untraditional means, e.g. his 800 number.

The media had less of an impact on an ideological candidate such as Jerry Brown because he had a firm base of supporters whose commitment did not rely on news judgments. In fact, the negative stories about Brown notified his ideological fellow travellers that he was their man. Brown was able to raise sufficient money to continue campaigning through the 800 number he publicized in his appearances on televised debates. Furthermore, as a candidate with strong and definable views, he continued to receive attention even after

he ceased to be a viable candidate and had become a spoiler. News organizations, especially television productions, provide time and space for candidates who positions that lend themselves to drama.

The nature of political coverage has changed in the campaigns leading up to and including 1992 in part because it became physically easier for reporters to follow a wide variety of events including those they did not personally observe Some of these came about because of new technologies while others were the result of new media forms. Transcripts became available almost instantly after every event. Reporters broadened their access to events because of the development of CNNs all news network and the expansion of public affairs coverage on two channels of CSPAN. These innovations brought harmful fallout in that the electronic wiring of events provides an immediacy that sometimes reduces the ability of journalists to process an event into a story. Michael Orestes, the national political correspondent of The New York Times in the early 1990s, suggested that coverage of Dan Quayle's selection by George Bush as his running mate in 1988 provides an example of how this happens.

> The Dan Quayle story was reported live in front of cameras. After Quayle was chosen by Bush, immediate attention was given by live television on his resume. Then he had live press conferences in his home time. Reporters couldn't decide what the story was.

> Quayle's National Guard service during the Vietnam War was a big story because it was on the electronic media. Reporters didn't go through their traditional process of analyzing what they had seen before writing about it.[5]

THE VIDEOTROPIC CAMPAIGN. In a 1985 University of Chicago round table, Theodore White provided an apt metaphor on the impact of television on presidential politics.

> There are certain plants that take root under a porch or in a dark place ... and then they will reach up and turn toward the sun. These are called heliotropic plants. All American politics today are videotropic. Every candidate turns or pitches his entire campaign to the sun of television.[6]

Although some observers suggest that television had become the dominant influence in the presidential election process as early as 1956, it was not until the 1968 and following campaigns that candidates and consultants organized their campaigns for transmission through television. By this time

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[5]Interview with Michael Orestes (MBG). Davis, California. April 25, 1990

[6]Quoted by Martin Schram in *The Great American Video Game.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987. p. 16.

there were in place a "set of changes: technological transformations that made it feasible to run a personal, candidate-centered campaign for nomination and election."[7] Nixon's organizers in 1968 allowed cameras to film in more and more situations while at the same time provided less access by reporters to the candidates. In the period 1968-88, Republicans became masters of this technique, in part because they controlled the White House for most of this time and thus could more easily keep the press at bay, As media consultant Roger Ailes declared in 1970, "this is the beginning of a whole new concept. This is it. This is the way they'll be elected forevermore. The next guys will have to be performers."[8]

Until the 1960 election, candidates needed the support of regional political leaders to get themselves into position to win their party's convention nomination. The 1960 process broke that mold for good. John Kennedy not only created alternative political organizations to mobilize his vote, but he used the techniques of "going public" to legitimate his candidacy. Kennedy's success demonstrated that the traditional political institutions had lost their decisive powers. Subsequently, as Samuel Kernell described the process,

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[7]John H. Aldrich, Presidential Campaign in Party and Candidate Centered Eras" in *Under the Watchful Eye: Managing Presidential Campaign in the Television Era, Mathew D. McCubbins (ed) (CQ Press: Washington, D.C., 1992, p. 64.*

[8]"Broadcast Spending: No Election Guarantee. *Congressional Quarterly* July 30, 1971) p, 162, /cited in Ansolabehere et. al, *The Media Game*, op. cit. p.74.

"coalition building proceeds less through mediating organizations and elite negotiation and more through the direct mobilization of national constituencies."[9] Going public meant candidates turned their attention to ways of using the channels of the media not only to reach existing constituencies but to create new ones.

In the 1980's, cable reception became increasingly available to households throughout the United States. For the 1984 election, 39 perecent of homes were wired for cable. In 1988 it was 49 percent. By 1992, it had reached 60 percent. During the same period, the major networks decreased their coverage of candidates and events. Most dramatically, the networks decreased their coverage of the nominating conventions, a blow to convention organizers who planned them as television events and who then had to figure out their schedules so that the best events would occur while the networks were watching.[10]

Television influences most at the onset of campaigns because it can establish solid flesh and blood images of candidates. It is at this pint that differences in coverage between print and television emerge. During the period when candidates try to establish themselves, the majority of television coverage

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[9]Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership.* Second Edition. (Washington, D.C." CQ Press, 1993) p. 34.

[10]See Larry David Smith and Dan K. Nimmo *Cordial Concurrence: Orchestrating National Party Conventions in the Telepolitical Age.*. New York: Praeger, 1991.

was negative in contrast to the print media where the assessment has tended to be more positive Although the print media still dominated the production of influential stories about the ideas of candidates, television had a greater impact on voters through the primary season. In the three presidential campaigns of the 1980s, surveys indicated that television provided the most important source of voter information. Trustworthiness of the media as measured by a television industry group found that people used televisions as their major source of news and that it also ranked as the most trustworthy of the media.[11] Similar results for the 1992 election continued to emphasize voters reliance on television, although, as we indicated earlier, candidates reached them through non-traditional forums such as Donahue, Larry King Live, and Arsinio, shows that

[11]The following chart is based on statistics compiled by the Center for Media and Public Affairs for the 1988 campaign.

reached an audience beyond the range of the attentive public who watch network news or MacNeil-Lehrer.

SOURCE OF MOST NEWS			MOST BELIEVABLE		
	1980	1984	1988	1980	1984	1988
TV	64	64	65	51	53	49
NEWS-PAPERS	64	40	42	22	24	26
RADIO	18	14	14	8	8	7
MAGA-ZINES	5	4	4	9	7	5
PEOPLE	4	4	5	NA	NA	NA

Because television must commit more resources to covering each individual candidate than does the print media, you can see the ways in which they make judgments more than is true with newspapers. They don't give equal coverage even early in the campaign.

The impact of the media on the presidential campaign may be most direct during the pre convention period when only the attentive public is paying

attention. During the primaries, reporters, editors and producers make decisions that influence the process of winnowing down the number of candidates who have a real chance of gaining the nomination.[12] This same process influences campaign organizations strategies for using the media. Campaign officials recognize that it is the media who decide who is to be taken seriously. During the period from 1968 to 1992, when the Democrats faced incumbent Republicans in every election except 1980, the media had a great deal of influence on potential Democratic nominees who did not have strong organizational and voter based support. By "anointing" campaigns, they influenced the amounts of money the candidates received from individual and PAC contributors whose support goes to likely winners.

During the campaigns of the 1980s, the news media employed two methods of legitimating candidates: first, through their analysis of a candidate and their judgments of his viability and his character; and, second, by serving as a forum through which candidates can get to voters. By this time, news organizations had replaced local party chiefs in establishing who would be considered as a legitimate candidate. Through the information and commentaries they provided their readers and viewers in their news stories and programs, they crowned the front runners and etched the portraits of candidates. In 1992, the cutbacks in the budgets of news departments could be seen in the

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[12]See Richard Davis, *The Press and American Politics* (New York: Longman, 1992) Pp. 267-69

type of coverage they provided. News organizations could not provide the resources to give equal amounts of space and time to every candidate. The television networks, for example, provided a crew consisting of: a reporter, a producer, a cameraman, and a soundman for each candidate. This meant that they had to decide where to invest these resources. Because television must commit more resources than print to covering each individual candidate their judgments as to who is worthy of attention becomes more visible than that of the print media. Clearly, equal coverage is not provided during the early primary process before a consensus has been reached as to who are the leading candidates.

In some respects, media influence on the early selection process was similar in 1992 to what it had been in previous elections.[13] The following assessment from the 1988 election illustrates this point. In terms of the number of stories written about the candidates in 1987 and their chances of winning the presidency, there was one Democrat, Gary Hart,, and one Republican, George Bush who received the most attention, . However, the difference between the treatment the two men received was great. For Bush, most of the stories were positive about his chances for winning (73%) while for Gary Hart most were negative (only 41% positive). For Bush, those early stories had the

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[13]For an analysis of video coverage see S. Robert Lichter, Daniel Amundson, and Richard Noyes, *The Video Campaign: Network Coverage of the 1988 Primaries (Washington: AEI, 1989).* For print media see Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wires and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983)

effect of reducing the number of people who were taken seriously. Bush was seen as the challenger against whom all of the other candidates would be measured. Only Dole (82%) and Robertson (84%) were seen as posing challenges. At the same time, the Democrats were boosted by the media singling out of Hart because the attention they gave him was mostly negative. Only 41% of the stories saw him as a winner.

THE TALK SHOW CIRCUIT.

Although the round table of reporters had been presented on television since the 1970s, the number of programs in which journalists presented their own analysis and predictions, already a growth industry in Washington, became a major factor for the campaign strategists. Republicans accused these "talking heads," as Bush referred to them, of creating a bandwagon effect for Clinton. The majority opinion on these programs by the middle of September, 1992, was that failing some favorable exogenous event or the collapse of the underpinnings of Clinton's candidacy, it would be very difficult for Bush to regain the level of support he would need to overcome Clinton's lead.

Although these talk shows are often regarded as an inside the beltway phenomena and thus not of great concern to the overwhelming majority of voters, they are watched by the campaign organizations. Without any evidence to back their fears up, campaign officials regard the talk shows as a daily scorecard that affects their ultimate standing.

THE HAUNTING BY THE 1988 CAMPAIGN: (THE SECOND COMING OF THE WILLIE HORTON ISSUE). News organizations including CNN and The New York Times devised their campaign coverage in response to the charge that they had been used by the campaign organizations in 1988 to send out negatives messages. Representatives of news organizations responded to charges chastising them for failing to distinguish attack ads from authentic reporting. Many correspondents accepted the criticism that the way in which they presented the campaign, especially on television, had augmented the process of negative campaigning. As a result, both television and print organizations made efforts to question the credibility of some campaign ads -- in effect challenging the veracity of a campaign's efforts to promote their candidate or undermine their opponent.

It is in this sense that the "Willie Horton issue" may be said to have dominated both the 1988 and 1992 presidential election, using "Willie Horton" as a metaphor for efforts to use attack ads against ones opponent. Because of news organizations response to the manner in which these attacks were successful in 1988, the impact of attack ads and efforts to identify one's opponent with unsavory traits was much less effective in 1992.

THE INCREASED IMPORTANCE OF NON EVENTS. News organizations sponsored and presented more polls than ever before in 1992 These polls became a central news story, analyzed by the organizations that prepared them. The

results, which generally showed Clinton with a strong lead, inspired a great deal of Republican resentment against the media. If news organizations predict that someone is doing well with voters before a primary, they can get more money on the basis of the prediction. In 1992, the pattern reasserted itself. Most news organizations saw Clinton as the heavy hitter early in this race and his fund raising power was greater than that of the others because of it. Tsongas, who had to build his legitimacy through his electoral support, ran out of money.

Predictions of success in the general election have drawn groups to Clinton that ordinarily would not be thought of as Democratic supporters, including the business group in Chicago that came out for him in the early Fall. He was able to raise his money earlier than was true for Bush. The Republicans were raising money even in the past couple of weeks of the campaign.

THE INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE PEROT CANDIDACY. The precedent of the self-propelled and self-financed candidacy of Ross Perot created problems for journalists who did not know how to present a candidate who so glibly defied the conventional wisdom, especially those precepts so often promulgated by the pundits of the political talk shows. Because of the uniqueness of his challenge to the system, most reporters discounted what proved to be his strong claim on a fifth of the voters and his staying power as a candidate despite intense coverage of his eccentricities and alleged foibles.

News organizations did report extensively on Perot's activities including his infomercials, his large expenditures, and especially the charges he leveled against the Bush campaign. What they failed to do was to provide a context to explain Perot success in holding the allegiance of such a sizeable portion of the electorate . Right up to election day,, most analysts were predicting that Perot's vote would decline when voters actually entered the booths.

CONCLUSIONS: THE MEDIA'S DIMINISHED ROLE

Post election analyses focus on changes that have taken place from one presidential contest to another. Of particular importance is the media's role as a conduit for the participants in the campaign. Change is a constant in the field of political communications, and every election seems to open up new avenues through which presidential candidates can reach out and touch the voters in this country. These changes are driven both by technological innovations and by the zealous efforts of candidates and their staff to gain some marginal advantage in the relentless combat characteristic of presidential campaigns. An additional factor for a comparative inquiry into the conduct of the campaign is the varying skills with which candidates use the media during their quest for the presidency. After each election many observers trace the result to the skill or ineptitude of a candidate and his campaign managers ability to handle news organizations. Sometimes even the candidates themselves see

the outcome in this way. In a meeting with reporters shortly after his defeat in the 1984 presidential contest. Walter Mondale ascribed his loss to his inability to use the media as effectively as his opponent.[14]

In addition, observers have noted the evolution of the role of journalists and their news organizations in defining the course and outcome of presidential campaigns. Journalists use their own yardsticks to measure the success of candidates and their organizations. Since the Johnson and Nixon campaigns, they have asserted more strongly their self-appointed function as the national arbiters of rectitude.[15]

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[14]*New York Times*, 1985. Among the many useful books and articles that deal with presidential elections and the media are Stephen Ansolabehere, Roy Behr and Shanto Iyengar's *The Media Game. American Politics in the Television Age*. (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993); James David Barber (ed) *Race for the Presidency: The Media and the Nominating Process* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1978); Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election, How Americans Choose Their President (New York: Praeger, 1980);* Austin Ranney, *Channels of Power: The Impact of Television on American Politics,* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80 (New York: Rusell Sage Foundation, 1983).*

[15]See *Portraying the President* by Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar. (Baltimore: 1981) Especially pp. 318-320

Not the least noteworthy aspect of the contest for the presidency in 1992 was the extent to which media coverage of the election struggle itself became such a central issue in the campaign. To be sure, complaints from campaign officials about the way in which reporters are covering the race is a standard feature of any presidential campaign. But 1992 brought assaults on the media that broke new ground in the always tense relationship between the media and the country's political leadership.[16]

It was certainly striking to see the President of the United States launching emotional attacks on media coverage of the campaign during his stump speeches. It was equally unprecedented to have a major political party like the Republicans suggesting that it was the media rather than the opposition candidate that voters should defeat at the polls. Witness the celebrated Republican bumper sticker in the 1992 campaign: "Annoy the media - Re-elect Bush." Noteworthy also was the hostility that President Bush's supporters directed at media personnel covering Republican rallies, up to and including physical harassment.

If the angriest attacks on news organizations came from the Republican side, the Clinton camp, (in somewhat softer tones) accused news organizations of focusing on small variations in his statements about his response to the draft

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[16]For an extensive analysis of the "attack role" of the press, see Larry J. Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy*. (New York: The Free Press, 1991)

in 1969 when he was a 23 year old student while ignoring increasing evidence that George Bush had lied about his role in the Iran-Contra affair. Democrats lowered their level of criticism in the fall when Clinton built a lead he never relinquished. But a level of hostility between the Clinton campaign and the media continued into the transition period and the beginning of the new administration. So much so that news organizations discussed the lack of any traditional "honeymoon" with the press.[17]

Why did resentment against the media reach such a high level in the 1992 campaign" Is there justification for the Republican charge that media coverage of the campaign was heavily tilted in favor the Democratic party and its presidential candidate, Bill Clinton? Critics of the media's role in the 1992 campaign were quick to find support for their allegation in a study published shortly after the election which showed a plurality of reporters leaning Democratic in their political orientation.

That the media's reporting of presidential campaigns have become increasingly harsh has become a matter of general agreement as demonstrated in surveys of the news and analyses by the scholars cited here. We believe that the question of "Media bias," that is whether the media show a particular political slant is unresolvable or at least a debate in which all sides are preaching to the converted. For this reason we do not find bias a useful factor

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[17]See "The News Medias Rush to Judgment on Clinton" by Elizabeth Kolbert. The New York Times National Edition, Sunday January 31, 1993, p. 14.

in illustrating the role that the media played in the 1992 and other recent presidential campaigns. Fortunately, there are several factors whose validity is easier to demonstrate and which have more explanatory power.

First there is the long daily relationship between campaign organizations and the journalists covering them. The singular function of a campaign organization involves the enlarging and rallying of a constituency. The process is manipulative. Reporters, who have grown tired with covering the story as put out by the campaign, find the techniques of manipulation and coalition building a more intriguing story. They also find this story easier to sell to their news organizations.[18]

Second,, we see in campaigns the role that most clearly fits the whole of the American journalists: their use of the media to promulgate their standards for rectitude. In this regard, the electoral process with its continuing deal making and manipulation provides the perfect behavioral sink.

However it is possible to draw a more arresting conclusion than an effort to resolve the question of media bias. The 1992 election results suggest that candidates can by their own efforts put the issues put forward by the media on the back burner of voter concerns. In the case of Clinton it was jobs while Perot made the deficit his issue. The success of both Clinton and Perot in this respect may owe much to the expanding role of the so-called alternative media

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[18]See Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking. (Lexington:, MA: D.C. Heath, 1973)*

forms in facilitating candidate contacts with the voters, as well as to the emergence of new presidential debate formats in which traditional media powerhouses, like the major television networks, play a far less dominant role than they once did. So historians may well mark 1992 as the year in which media power in presidential politics greatly declined, rather than, as George Bush has so plaintively complained, the year in which an imperial media succeeded in defeating an incumbent president.

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