

and who, in appealing to the elemental passions of voters, sowed violence and discord wherever he went....If Wallace was a regional, one-issue candidate, then Florida was his region and busing was his issue. Wallace was also, in Florida at least, the frontrunning candidate, and for television news, the one explained the other....The magnitude of Wallace's Florida victory—a forty-two per cent plurality in a field of eleven candidates—suggested that his voter support represented something far larger than a narrowly-defined regional appeal....It was in the aftermath of the Wisconsin primary that the Wallace transformation was completed in network coverage of his campaign. No longer a regional one-issue candidate, he was now an anti-establishment, populist candidate who articulated the political frustration of America's white working class....both Wallace and McGovern had touched, in Wisconsin and elsewhere, a deep vein of restless dissatisfaction within the electorate.... For television news, the governor's appeal was no longer Southern, but populist and anti-establishment. His issue was not simply busing, but the failure of liberal government to respond to the needs of America's "little man."...his campaign assumed a symbolic quality, an instructive value, for network news. That is, for most newsmen, the interest of the Wallace campaign was to be found in what it revealed about the moods and political temperament of the American electorate rather than the governor's efforts toward the party nomination. In this light, he became not so much a candidate for the presidency as a "messenger of discontent," a "symbol of protest," ...in all of Wallace's post-Wisconsin primaries, then, the network focus was on the anti-establishment and populist content of his campaign....The Wallace transformation in television coverage of his campaign—from "regional, one-issue candidate" to "anti-establishment populist"—clearly worked to the governor's advantage. The populist theme was positive, identifying Wallace not with a narrowly-defined constituency of Southern anti-busing voters, but with a deep current of discontent within American society that knew no geographical boundaries and that was confined to no single issue. Because television news viewed that current as a significant political phenomenon to be reckoned with by all of the candidates in the primary season, it also viewed the Wallace campaign as a significant and important political phenomenon. The populist theme seems particularly favorable when compared with a major theme used by television news in covering the governor's 1968 presidential campaign—"Wallace, the sower of violence and discord."

Henry Jackson

The campaign for voter support—perhaps the most superficial expression of democratic politics—is precisely what captures the eye of the television camera. Issues and ideologies are minimized; the candidate's personality, political style and campaign strategy are elevated to positions of primary importance. In Jackson's case, at least, this was unfor-

unate....So, as characterized by the themes of the network news profiles, then, Henry Jackson was a politician of the old order—traditional and rather colorless in political style, but shrewdly calculating and opportunistic in his pursuit of votes....

John Lindsay

Lindsay, perhaps more than any other candidate, was victimized by the thematic content of television news reports on his candidacy....The mayor's slim chances for the nomination provided the point of departure for almost every network report on his campaign activities....Searching for explanations for the candidate's disappointing primary performance, television news probed the campaign to locate its problems and difficulties, its limitations and failures....the Lindsay of "real-life" was something quite different from the Lindsay of media image. And the "image and reality" theme became less an explanation for Lindsay's unsuccessful ventures into the Democratic primaries than in indictment of the candidate as a kind of deceptive political sorcerer who manipulates appearances

James R. Ferguson:

A Note on the Newsworthiness of Television News

The themes used by television news in covering the four major candidates of this year's Democratic primary season determined much of the content (and hence, much of the nature) of that coverage. Whether a candidate emerged favorably or unfavorably from network descriptions of his campaign depended largely on how he was characterized by those themes. And in this sense, the failure of television news to provide balanced and equitable coverage of all the candidates flowed largely from what has been called the journalistic as opposed to political bias of network newsmen—that is, their need to present the news in an entertaining as well as informative manner. (Paul H. Weaver, "Is Television News Biased?" *The Public Interest*, Winter, 1972, p. 67.)

While the network reliance on themes in covering presidential politics goes far in explaining the nature of bias in television news, it also poses another, and perhaps more disturbing question—what kinds of information does television news provide the viewing audience? Clearly, newsmen provide information on the dynamics of the campaign, and in particular, on the positions of the various candidates in relation to their competing rivals. The frontrunner-underdog-dark horse themes are all concerned with this type of news. And occasionally, newsmen provide "information" on what might be called the political personality of the candidate. "Hubert Humphrey, the old line politician" is an example of this type of theme.

But such kinds of information are not—or at least, should not be—useful in the election of men to positions of public authority. Ideally, the citizens of a demo-

cratic society measure and evaluate a candidate for office not in terms of his position in the polls or his performance in the primaries, but rather, in terms of his experience, his perception of national needs and his proposals for meeting those needs. This kind of vital information was sadly lacking in television coverage of the Democratic primaries, largely because the themes used by network news focused on campaign strategy and performance, and excluded the more substantive concerns of issues and ideology.

Shirley Chisholm

Because she was a black and a woman, and because she freely admitted (unlike Hartke or Yorty) that she did not expect to reach the presidency, Mrs. Chisholm was viewed as an atypical politician whose candidacy represented something more fundamental than a mere effort at political self-advancement....While the other candidates' talk of noble ventures and unselfish commitment was usually interpreted as a deceptive cover for the actual sources of their political behavior, Mrs. Chisholm's self-characterizations and statements of purpose were accepted unquestioningly for the most part by television news....while Mrs. Chisholm was, like Vance Hartke and Sam Yorty, a presidential impossibility, she seemed heroic rather than comic in defying the odds against her... □

James R. Ferguson is a graduate student in history at Indiana University and co-author of The Alternative's study of television news.

This was nowhere more clearly evident than in the network coverage of the early frontrunner, Edmund Muskie. If Muskie was indeed the early favorite for the Democratic nomination, it would seem that information concerning his perception of national issues would be particularly valuable. And there was much to be said along these lines. The senator's reputation as a cautious politician who carefully weighed all the alternatives before making policy decisions suggests, for example, that his changing views on the Vietnam War were born of a fundamental re-thinking of foreign policy assumptions. And what was Muskie's position on military budget cuts? On a volunteer army? On family planning? On national health insurance? Needless to say, the frontrunner theme did not go very far in answering these questions. Even the CBS introductory profile (which was not a "hard news" story) concerned itself with Muskie's ideology hardly at all, preferring rather to focus on his frontrunner status. Television news' most significant attempts to describe the senator's positions and proposals consisted largely of excerpts from the candi-

date's speeches in which he responded to such things as President Nixon's Vietnam and busing proposals. The viewer who relied exclusively on television news for information on the presidential politics of 1972 would be hard pressed indeed to comment on the Democratic frontrunner's issue-oriented positions. It would seem that such a viewer could only observe that Muskie was aligned in opposition to Nixon, that he had changed his thinking on Vietnam, that he had adopted a qualified (and in Florida, politically expedient) position in support of busing, that he indulged in "frontrunner platitudes" ("trust Muskie") and that he was a "centrist" ideologue — hardly the kind of information that would make for an intelligent evaluation of the senator's qualifications for the presidency.

Of all the major candidates, Hubert Humphrey was perhaps the most victimized by the networks' proclivity for minimizing experience, issues and ideology. The "old line politician" theme suggested that Humphrey's long career weighed like a political albatross around his neck and largely ignored the possibility that his experience might very well be a political plus for him. After all, Humphrey was experienced in governmental administration at both the urban and the national levels. He had, for more than twenty years, participated actively in the struggle to achieve racial equality. And, as Howard K. Smith and Eric Sevareid noted, he had a record as an imaginative and effective legislator whose name was "writ Hancock-size" on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Peace Corps and Medicaid. But the triumphs of Humphrey's career did not figure prominently in the "traditionalist politician" theme.

Humphrey was also victimized by the networks' penchant for placing issues and ideology within the larger context of campaign strategy and tactics. His issue-oriented attack on George McGovern in the final weeks before the California primary was viewed by television news as a tactical device designed to salvage his failing campaign. Because of this, the substance or content of Humphrey's criticisms were excluded all together from news coverage of the primary, overshadowed entirely by the network focus on the dynamics of the campaign. And it would seem, judging from Senator McGovern's eventual withdrawal of his controversial welfare proposals, for example, that, on some points at least, Humphrey had a solid case that was certainly worthy of public attention.

George McGovern benefited from many of the themes used by network news in covering his campaign, but the accompanying minimization of issues and ideology did not work to his advantage. This was particularly true in the early months of the primary season, when McGovern was characterized as an underdog or dark horse. Because the polls (and hence, television news) defined his position as that of a minor candidate, his views, too, became minor in news coverage of the early primaries. For most newsmen, the senator was, in

the beginning, a one-issue, anti-war candidate, and little more. McGovern was strongly opposed to the war, of course, but his views on Vietnam were only one expression of his larger thinking on American foreign policy, and in particular, his estimation of the degree to which military resources are necessary to preserve or advance American interests in international affairs. McGovern's thinking on foreign policy together with his economic philosophy set him apart from many of his Democratic rivals. And, judging from his ready acceptance of Hubert Humphrey's invitation to debate in the California primary, he was as anxious as the Minnesota senator to make clear their ideological differences (and to make clear to the voting public that he was fully within the American political orthodoxy). But the assumptions and arguments which separated McGovern from Humphrey were lost to the viewers of television news. Even in covering the debates, the networks focused, not on the content of McGovern's arguments, but on his strengthened position as the California frontrunner: "As reporters rushed to surround the two candidates after the program last night, you could almost hear the sigh of relief from the McGovern camp coast-to-coast, with their man not only

standing, but hardly perspiring. (McGovern remarks) McGovern's strategy, looking more toward Richard Nixon, had been to erase his radical image while avoiding a brawl with Humphrey. He thinks Humphrey is looking desperately for some way to stage an upset..." (CBS, 5-31-72)

The George Wallace ideology was characterized by television news first as Southern, anti-busing and (implicitly, if not explicitly) segregationist, then as a vaguely-defined, anti-government populism. And as described by newsmen, his proposals seemed to be limited to tax relief and to "shut(ing) off every school bus in the country (ABC, 3-17-72). In fact, ABC's Howard K. Smith described the Alabama governor as "planless" (6-7-72). If the Wallace proposals were indeed limited and superficial, they could have been revealed as such when placed next to the reasoned arguments and fully-developed proposals of the other candidates. Such information would constitute an invaluable contribution to American democratic politics. As it was, however, Muskie, Humphrey and McGovern seemed in network coverage of their candidacies, almost inarticulate on matters of national concern, and hence, indistinguishable in this respect from the "planless" George Wallace. □

Marc Plattner:

The Networks' Views of the Campaign: A Critical Assessment

Television is, among other things, an instrument of persuasion. And it is clearly in this light that candidates understand it and attempt to use it. They wish to appear on the evening news, and in as favorable a light as possible, in order to win over voters. But from the point of view of the newsmen themselves, who are employed, after all, not by the candidates but by the networks, the role of television news is quite different. To some extent, the TV reporters view themselves simply as another branch of the journalistic profession, whose function it is to inform the people, to give them "the facts." But the nature of the medium in which they work imposes its own set of demands on the electronic journalists and makes television news a very different sort of product from newspaper news. TV news is part of an industry which is devoted to entertainment, and the news programs must compete in the ratings for viewers who watch television primarily to be entertained. These circumstances, together with the TV news form itself, create inevitable pressures for the news to be presented in the most exciting and dramatic possible fashion...

In its effort to describe the events of the political season in an entertaining fashion, network news is aided by its own image of American politics — an image that emphasizes the individualistic and highly competitive nature of the political campaign. This image conceives of American politics as a kind of game played by self-serving politi-

cians, and thus reduces the campaign itself to a competitive "horseshoe," as Walter Cronkite made clear in reporting on the Florida primary (CBS, 3-14-72):

"This Florida primary tonight is a game of percentages, best illustrated perhaps by that old cliché of the horse-race. It is where the seven serious campaigners here finish in the field and by how much they outdistance their immediate rivals that will influence the racing form for the twenty-one other primaries on down the road.

(Cut camera to map of Florida; pennants with candidates' names appear when the candidates are mentioned) "George Wallace is odds-on favorite here; he may be running a race by himself out front. Bunched back there in the pack for second: Washington Senator Scoop Jackson and the two who were 1968 entries, Ed Muskie and Hubert Humphrey. Believed to be further back, a two-horse race for fifth, New York's Mayor John Lindsay and George McGovern. And somewhere on back there, the first black woman candidate for president, Shirley Chisholm.

"This is George Wallace country (camera cuts back to anchor man) and if he isn't several lengths ahead by race's end, the rail birds are going to cluck derisively over his future prospects. Washington's Senator Scoop Jackson, who thought his brand of middle-road conservatism would look good here in Florida until Wallace entered, is now in the race for second place, with longtime frontrunner Edmund Muskie making a