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64. Germond and Witcover, *Mad as Hell*, 408.
65. David M. Timmerman and Larry David Smith, "The 1992 Presidential Nominating Conventions: Cordial Concurrence Revisited," in *The 1992 Presidential Campaign*, ed. Denton, 70.
66. Timmerman and Smith, "The 1992 Presidential Nominating Conventions," 71.
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68. When Ford issued his challenge to Carter, he was trailing badly in the polls and needed something to give a boost to his campaign. As Bitzer and Rueter point out, Ford chose a prime moment at the convention to announce his intention to debate. In his speech accepting the nomination, Ford was aggressive and confident, and when he challenged Carter to a debate, the convention audience gave sustained applause. See Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).
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## 3



## Communicative Styles and Strategies of Political Campaigns

One of the central imperatives of political campaign communication is the whole notion of the manner in which incumbents seek reelection and their challengers seek to replace them—in other words, the style and strategies used by candidates as they campaign. Campaign styles have undergone significant changes over the years. There have been, for example, elections when candidates campaigned by staying home and saying nothing. There have been others when the contenders "swung around the circle" on anything from trains to jets to riverboats to buses in an effort to draw attention to themselves and to be seen and heard by as many voters as possible. And we can each recall instances of campaigns that have been waged primarily by means of the mass media. In short, there has been no one way in which local, state, or national contenders have gone about the task of getting our vote. Strategies have been as varied and sometimes outrageous as those who have used them. Perhaps because of this, there has been relatively little systematic investigation or analysis of the communicative strategies and styles that have been, and continue to be, used by all manner of incumbents and challengers.

Thus, the subject of this chapter is the exploration of campaign styles. While it may be that readers are more interested in contemporary examples, the present is better understood when viewed from the perspective of the past. For this reason, examples from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century campaigns have been incorporated, thereby providing a more complete catalog of the communication strategies important to all who have sought and those who will seek elective office.

Understanding of the material in this chapter is enhanced by an examination of three preliminary considerations that are important to the way in which candidates campaign. A consideration of the term *style* is first. Second is a discussion of political image and its role in developing campaign styles. Third is an exploration of the relationship of technological advancements to styles of campaigning.

### Preliminary Considerations

#### Style

For many years, style has been studied by scholars who are interested in the customs and rules governing the use of language, including the choice of words (figures of speech) and the way the words are arranged (syntactical patterns) in oral and written communication. Although controversy over its meaning occurred historically because some believed style was divorced from content and only a frill or ornamentation, the conception of style as the peculiar manner in which people express themselves by means of language has been generally accepted. In other words, style traditionally has been the province of those concerned with the correctness, beauty, or even workability of language—the investigation or analysis of the words and arrangements a speaker or writer chooses in preparing a message. Thus, one of the elements to be considered in the analysis of campaign style is the language that political candidates use as they campaign.

More recently, however, communication theorists have argued that style should not be limited to the language but ought to be considered a quality pervading all elements of an individual's communication. Considered in this way, style would include each of the nonverbal aspects of communication—including physical behavior, sound of the voice, body shape and movement, appearance, clothing, and choice of settings—that operate as symbols to create the meanings we infer from the transaction. In written messages, a number of symbols (in addition to language) create meaning, such as the quality, texture, size, and color of the paper and whether it is handwritten or typed for one particular person or printed and prepared for distribution to many. Thus, in election campaigns, style can be seen as a blend of what candidates say—in speeches, news conferences, websites, talk show interviews, advertisements, brochures, and so on—as well as their nonverbal political acts or behavior, such as kissing babies, wearing funny hats, shaking hands at rallies, waving at crowds from the motorcade, and their facial expressions and gestures while answering a question. It is what Bruce Gronbeck terms a question of "leadership style"—a combination of habitual modes of thought and action on which individuals perceive or judge a candidate.<sup>1</sup>

What does any of this have to do with our analysis of campaign styles and strategies? In this chapter, style is a manner of campaigning that can be recognized by the characteristics defining it and giving it form. We have termed these characteristics "communication strategies" and the styles "incumbency," "challenger," and the combined "incumbent/challenger." Certainly, in describing each of the styles we have been concerned with the traditional dimension of language; but as you have seen in the first two chapters, we believe strongly that political campaign communication is much more than just "talk." Thus, as the styles are explored, it will become obvious that many of the characteristics deal with nonverbal political behaviors as well as verbal.

#### Image and Campaign Style

Imagery plays an important role in the consideration of style. All candidates, whether they campaign using the strategies of incumbency or those of the challenger, must do and say whatever it is that will enhance voter perception of them. They are concerned, in other words, about their image.

Although widespread awareness regarding the significance of image creation to the political campaign did not occur until the early 1970s, it had been used for years. The first major image campaign took place in the presidential campaign of 1840 when the Whigs, after searching for a candidate they thought could defeat Martin Van Buren, found no one. So they invented a national hero, gave him a slogan, said he was champion of the ordinary citizen as well as a giant of the frontier, and elected a president.<sup>2</sup> When William Henry Harrison was "discovered" by the Whigs, he was sixty-seven years old, serving as clerk of courts of Hamilton County, Ohio, a long-retired army officer, and he had spent twelve years in Congress and three years as ambassador to Colombia.

While military and legislative experience must be considered reasonable credentials for a presidential challenger, Harrison's career had been distinctly undistinguished. The Whigs, however, billed Harrison as a legendary Indian fighter and maintained that he was known widely and fondly as "Old Tippecanoe." The Whig campaign ignored all issues, except those relating to the personality of their candidates, and gave image creation and "hype" a permanent place in presidential politics. When Democrats suggested that the aging Harrison might be content to spend his declining days in a log cabin "studying moral philosophy"—provided he had a barrel of hard cider at his side—the Whigs cleverly turned the attack into a reinforcement of Harrison's contrived image as a "common man."<sup>3</sup> From then on, every Whig rally sported cider barrels and miniature log cabins, and songs were written and sung celebrating Harrison's humble tastes (the idea being that if logs and liquor were good enough for the people, they were also good

enough for the president). Lyrics from one of the campaign songs best describe the image created by the Whigs:

No ruffled shirt, no silken hose,  
 No airs does Tip display;  
 But like the "pitch of worth" he goes  
 In homespun "hodding gray."  
 Let Van from his coolers of silver drink wine  
 And lounge on his cushioned seats,  
 Our man on a buckeye bench can recline  
 Content with hard cider is he!

Image campaigns did not end with the elevation of Old Tippecanoe to the presidency. Instead, the place of imagery became entrenched in elective politics, especially in the area of campaign style, where specific strategies must be created and utilized to keep alive the perception of an incumbent or a challenger. The Harrison campaign's visual symbol of the log cabin represents what has come to be called "image" advertising in politics. As political analyst Wilcomb E. Washburn argues, "The modern-day equivalent would be the 30-second television spot commercial."<sup>5</sup>

The importance of imagery is evidenced each time we see yet another television commercial of a candidate surrounded by family, talking earnestly with a senior citizen, walking through a peanut field, or standing in front of a sea of flags. Television commercials that present candidates in such situations are clearly designed to build or maintain certain perceptions of the candidate. Political images, however, are more complex than simply the strategies devised to present a candidate to voters. Images should also be considered in terms of the impressions voters have—what they believe to be true or untrue, desirable or undesirable about the candidates and the campaign. As Kenneth E. Boulding writes in his classic book, *The Image*, each of us possesses a store of subjective knowledge about the world, a collection of ideas we believe to be true. This knowledge constitutes our image.<sup>6</sup> While in recent years the work of a number of researchers has served to broaden the perspective by which scholars as well as practitioners view image, nonetheless, it is generally understood that the strategies candidates use to construct a public persona constitute an important area of political communication inquiry. We believe, however, that despite the importance of a candidate's role in the creation of a public perception, it is only part of the equation. In his doctoral dissertation on the construction of image in television spot commercials, Allan Loudon argues that image is "more than the message projected by a candidate or even a picture created by a voter. Image is an evaluation negotiated and constructed by candidates and voters in a cooperative venture."<sup>7</sup> In other words, beliefs voters have about candidates

are based on the interaction or interdependence of what candidates do and the evaluative responses voters have to it: a "transaction between a candidate and voter."<sup>8</sup> The view of image as a transaction, however, raises questions of balance or proportion between the strategies used by a candidate to create an image and the ideas already believed by the voter. Is one more important to the creation of persona than the other? Is one more likely to influence voter behavior than the other? Generally, researchers believe that one dimension does not necessarily play a more pivotal role than the other. People have some preconceived ideas regarding what a candidate's personal characteristics and behavior should be, and these ideas are continually measured against the reality of what an actual candidate says and does during the campaign. In this way, voters define the campaign for themselves—sorting through competing or contradictory messages. However, there are circumstances in which the balance between the idealized and actual can be disrupted. For example, the context in which the campaign occurs can become the dominating force—as was the Great Depression during the 1932 presidential campaign and the Vietnam War during the 1972 election. In each instance, the images of the candidates were framed by an all-consuming event that in some instances overshadowed the candidates' strategies to build an image and in others overcame voters' preconceptions of the "ideal" candidate.

It is also possible that a single and dramatic campaign event can tip the scale one way or the other. During the surfacing period of the 1988 presidential campaign, Senator Gary Hart's alleged relationship with a Miami model, his challenge to the media to prove the relationship, the public accusation by reporters from the *Miami Herald*, and the subsequent intensity of national media attention completely overwhelmed anything else Hart said or did. No image strategies the senator might have utilized could have competed with public preconceptions about the way in which candidates who would be president should behave and the contrast of this with Hart's alleged behavior. And in 1984 when Geraldine Ferraro was nominated by the Democratic Party for vice president, we believe that there was very little the congresswoman could have said or done to have created a public persona favorable enough to refute the preconceptions of some Americans regarding the personal characteristics or attributes vice presidents are expected to possess. She, in fact, did not look or sound like—she did not resemble—a vice presidential nominee. Thus, for some voters the fact of Ferraro's gender created an imbalance between imaging determinants.

Even though imbalance regarding the way in which people organize their thoughts about politics can occur, nonetheless, a consistent finding after years of research indicates that we share a lot of beliefs about the personal qualities candidates ought to possess—especially presidential candidates. Moreover, these characteristics are strongly associated with voting prefer-

ences and, in most cases, dominate ideas (cognitions) about the candidates and the campaign.<sup>9</sup> These personal qualities or attributes tend to cluster around such leadership characteristics as competency, experience, trustworthiness, ability to be calm, cautiousness, decisiveness, and boldness<sup>10</sup> and closely related personality characteristics such as strength, honesty, fairness, open-mindedness, reliability, energy, and physical attractiveness.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not a candidate exists who embodies all of these attributes is almost immaterial in that we use the characteristics as a basis of comparison—a standard—by which to judge the acceptability of the flesh-and-blood women and men actually seeking our votes. As voters, we may ask ourselves whether the candidate campaigns as an incumbent should or whether the challenger fulfills our expectations.

Viewed from this perspective, the reason for two common campaign activities becomes clear. First, one of the most crucial tasks facing candidates, especially during the surfacing stage, is to determine just what attributes voters believe are ideal for the office sought. Second, campaign activities in later stages are designed to attempt to illustrate that the candidate possesses these qualities.

Although we know that voter assessment of a candidate's image is a significant factor in voting behavior (far more important, for example, than party identification) and that voters have a mental picture of an ideal candidate that they use as a gauge in evaluating actual candidates, it is less clear whether these characteristics vary among candidates and across election levels. In other words, are all candidates competing in the same race judged by the same preconceived attributes, and are the dimensions of "idealness" the same for candidates running for local offices as they are for those campaigning for president? While scholars studying the political campaigns of the 1970s into the twenty-first century have provided few absolutes, some evidence indicates that the relative importance of particular clusters of characteristics has remained fairly constant from presidential election to election. For example, in a study spanning across four New Hampshire presidential primary cycles, Judith Trent and colleagues found that most characteristics voters believe important for presidential candidates to possess (honesty, faithfulness to spouse, and moral integrity) remain constant. In 2000, as contrasted with 1996, the New Hampshire voters who were surveyed had some change of mind about the importance of just two characteristics: The capability to talk about problems facing the country was less important to them in 2000 than it had been in 1996, and interpersonal characteristics were more important than they had been in 1996.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, it is uncertain whether questions regarding preconceived image characteristics are important in local races where the attributes and idiosyncrasies of the candidates as well as their positions on the relevant issues are well known. However, a study in 1998 of one of the image charac-

teristics, physical attractiveness, in which subjects were told that the pictures they viewed were of candidates in local and congressional races, Jimmie Trent and coresearchers found that physical attractiveness on initial candidate selection was an asset. In every case, across race, gender, and age, subjects preferred the most physically attractive candidates.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, further research is needed before we can say with any degree of certainty that voter expectations either do or do not vary across candidates and across election levels. One thing, though, is clear. The creation and maintenance of image, long a part of political campaigns, plays a dominant role because voters have a whole series of impressions regarding the behavior of those who seek elective office that they compare with a personal vision of an ideal candidate. And although other factors are important to the consideration of campaign style, it may well be that the extent to which a candidate is able to achieve these idealized expectations is the extent to which success can be achieved on election day.

### Technology and Campaign Style

During the earliest period of our electoral system, the style of political campaigning was, at least in part, defined by the limits of our transportation system. This is one of the reasons that there were no national political campaigns as we think of them today. While it is true that in 1789 and again in 1792 George Washington had no opposition, it would have been difficult for him to conduct a national campaign even had it been necessary for him to do so. Travel was difficult, uncomfortable, and time-consuming. Even in 1800, when the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans launched the first activity that could be called a presidential campaign, it was not a national or even a regional effort. The rallies, parades, and leaflets were not nationally planned but the work of individual county and state political committees. The national road system, begun in Maryland in 1808, was the chief east-west artery, and it did not reach even the Ohio border until 1817. Commercial water travel started in 1807, but it took many days just to go from Pittsburgh to New York City. Therefore, the presidential election of 1824 was the first one in which any real mass campaigning took place. Friends of the three candidates (John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson) traveled within their own and neighboring states to campaign for the presidential contenders.

Although the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad began in 1829, it was 1853 before the tracks reached the Mississippi River and 1869 before the transcontinental railroad system was completed in Ogden, Utah. By 1854, although the transportation system had improved, it still took thirty hours to travel from Indianapolis to Cleveland by rail and twenty-four hours from Chicago to St. Louis. Thus, it is small wonder that 1840 was the first time

a political party conducted a national campaign by sending speakers to then all twenty-six states or that 1860 was the first time a presidential candidate traveled throughout the north campaigning for his own election. Moreover, it was not until 1896, after railroads serviced most of the nation and automobile production had begun, that a presidential challenger, William Jennings Bryan, was able to "whirl" through twenty-one states, give six hundred speeches, and be seen by five million people.

Developments in the transportation network continued to affect the style of political campaigning. For example, the beginning of air travel in the 1920s allowed Franklin Roosevelt to fly to Chicago to accept the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932, just as the initiation of commercial jet service in 1959 afforded Richard Nixon and John Kennedy the opportunity to conduct "jet-stop" campaigns in 1960.

However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a second factor had become important to the development of campaign style. With the invention of the telegraph in 1835, a communication network was able to transcend those of transportation because messages were able to move at the speed of electrical impulses rather than the speed of humans, horses, boats, or trains.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the emergence of the telephone in 1876, wireless telegraph and the motion picture camera in 1895, commercial radio in 1920, and motion pictures with sound in 1927 allowed the public to "bypass the written word and extend communication senses and capabilities directly."<sup>15</sup> Communication scholar Frederick Williams has written that "speech and images could now span distances, be preserved in time, and be multiplied almost infinitely."<sup>16</sup>

Even the first advances in the communication network began to influence political campaigning. For example, one of the primary issues of the 1848 presidential campaign was the almost two-year war with Mexico. The Whigs selected one of the war's heroes, General Zachary Taylor, as their candidate. The principal reason the war could become important to the campaign was that the initiation of commercial telegraph service in 1844 and the subsequent founding of the Associated Press Wire Service had provided far more rapid news than the country had ever known. Citizens were aware of specific battles and vigorously applauded each victory over the Mexicans. In other words, the telegraph was able to inject the war into the campaign with an immediacy not known before.

By the campaign of 1884, the telegraph had so unified the nation's communication system that, as James G. Blaine unwittingly discovered, even one election eve gaffe could be telegraphed across the country and influence election returns. The day before the election, a Republican clergyman denounced the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, by saying that his party was the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion." Republican candidate Blaine failed to disavow the statement and therefore lost the support

of Irish Catholic voters. Another thousand votes in New York, a stronghold of Irish Catholics, would have elected him.

Although each early communication development had some influence on political campaigning, certainly the most dramatic were the changes brought about by radio. Beginning in 1921, when President Warren Harding first used the new medium to talk to the public, the radio became the nation's most important means of political communication. It remained so until the widespread use of television in 1952.<sup>17</sup> Radio had a direct effect on campaign style because it made the personal appearances of candidates less necessary by providing an option. For the first time, candidates (even unknown ones) could become public personalities without campaigning around the country. In 1924, William McAdoo, a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, hoped to establish a radio station powerful enough to reach all parts of the country so that he would not have to travel around the nation making speeches.<sup>18</sup> Although McAdoo never put his plan into action, losing the nomination to John W. Davis, subsequent candidates did. In 1928, Republican contender Herbert Hoover undertook only a few public appearances. Rather, he made seven radio speeches the focal point of his campaign. In 1936, 1940, and 1944, incumbent Franklin Roosevelt used radio-extensively so that he could reach the entire nation without traveling.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the early achievements in electronic media had a profound effect on the manner of political campaigning. Although many innovations have occurred, those that have had some direct effect on campaign style include the beginning of scheduled television broadcasts in 1941, the first electronic computer in 1942, the beginning of color television in 1951, the introduction of portable video recorders in 1968, the widespread use of microelectronic chips in 1970, the perfected development of fiber-optic signal transmission in 1975, the popularity of home computers in 1980, the use of cable television in 1984, the widespread use of videocassettes and satellite transmissions in 1988,<sup>20</sup> the use of online computer networks and bulletin boards in 1992, the use of candidate listservs and online home pages in 1996, and the increased interactivity of candidates' websites with voters in 2000.

In 1999, the Missouri Republican Party, in an ultimately successful effort to elect Susan C. Phillips to the state House of Representatives, used Map Applications software to target three thousand voters with personal appeals via information received from public records, phone interviews, and computer-assisted surveys. In 2000, Hillary Rodham Clinton's New York senatorial campaign found a new way to get up-to-date information about constituents to the candidate and her speechwriters. Campaign volunteers called voters and requested their participation in answering a questionnaire regarding their views on selected issues and personal backgrounds. Partici-

pant responses were then faxed to a computer and recorded and then digitally sent to another computer to be sorted for an overnight report. The report about voters' positions as well as information regarding the success and weaknesses of the campaign were sent to the campaign staff. Thus, as Rodham Clinton campaigned, each day she had the most recent information possible about the issues important to each audience as well as some knowledge about "who they were" for each audience she addressed.

In the largest sense, television, as radio had done earlier, increased the number of campaign strategies available because candidates no longer had to be dependent on extensive national speaking tours to become well known to the public. A few nationwide television speeches, a series of well-executed and well-placed advertising spots, an appearance on one of the news/issues programs such as *Meet the Press*, campaign coverage on the evening network news broadcasts, and several appearances on the popular talk shows guaranteed public awareness. In addition, television, unlike radio, enhanced campaign swings by showing parts of them in evening news broadcasts. Although the candidate might go to one state or region of the country to campaign in person, millions of people across the country participated in the rally or parade by watching the pageantry from their own living rooms. Not only did a television campaign provide candidates with more exposure, but it also allowed for more flexibility in the management of physical and financial resources. Perhaps the essence of the mass media strategy of the late 1960s and the 1970s is explained best in a memorandum written by H. R. Haldeman (and interpreted by Theodore White), in which he outlined the plan for Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign:

Americans no longer gather in the streets to hear candidates; they gather at their television sets or where media assemble their attention. A candidate cannot storm the nation; at most he can see and let his voice be heard by no more than a million or two people in a Presidential year (the reach of the individual campaigner doesn't add up to diddly-squat in votes). One minute or thirty seconds on the evening news shows of Messrs. Cronkite or Huntley/Brinkley will reach more people than ten months of barnstorming. One important favorable Washington column is worth more than two dozen press releases or position papers. News magazines like *Time* or *Newsweek*, picture magazines like *Life* and *Look* are media giants worth a hundred outdoor rallies. Therefore the candidate must not waste time storming the country, personally pleading for votes—no matter what he does, he can appear in newsprint or on television only once a day. The inner strength and vitality of the candidate must not be wasted; if you do more than one thing a day, you make a mistake. If you test a man's physical strength too far, you push him beyond the realm of good judgment; both candidate and the following press must be given time to stop, rest, reflect and write. The importance of old-style-outdoor campaigning now lies less in what the candidate tells the people than in what he learns from them

with the important secondary value that outdoor exertions do provide the vital raw stuff for television cameras.<sup>21</sup>

Although 1968 was not the first time television had been used extensively in a campaign, it was the first time that a presidential candidate had planned his entire candidacy around the medium. Richard Nixon not only used technology to help him win an election but added an important dimension to campaign style—one that extended, in fact, to 1992 when Ross Perot became the nation's first true mass media presidential contender. Perot bypassed political parties, primaries, and traditional campaigning. Instead, he relied exclusively on television and computer technology.

In a similar fashion, the computer has made a profound impact on the manner of political campaigning in the 1980s, 1990s, and into elections in the 2000s. Its speed in information processing and its ability to allow web-based interaction between the campaign 2000 candidates and voters, as well as its ability to automate many of our methods of information analysis, have provided candidates with an invaluable resource in such traditional tasks as identifying and communicating with specific publics or raising funds.

Computer technology has also been enormously beneficial to the media. For example, on September 15, 1987, "The Presidential Campaign Hotline" went online. The hotline is a computer network that transmits campaign information each morning to subscribers (many of them are media outlets) for a monthly fee. The purpose of the service is to keep subscribers fully appraised of developments in the race for the White House, such as late-breaking news of events in the field; forwarding news stories, editorials, and columns from influential periodicals and local newspapers in battleground states; and up-to-the-minute analysis from assorted campaign experts. The hotline's practice of carrying daily reports from each presidential campaign press secretary has also created a unique opportunity for each campaign to determine and circulate its own interpretation of events (spin control) before such events have had the chance to make an impact on their own.<sup>22</sup> Thus, direct mail, instant voter prediction and analysis, and the campaign hotline are all part of the new politics facilitated by the computer.

But just as important as the past are the possibilities for the future—some of which have already been experienced in the campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s. Such communication technologies as the computer, cable television service, push-button telephones, videocassettes, and video disks have already or could completely change the nature of campaigns by allowing voters to interact with the candidate from their own living rooms. In other words, instead of a candidate simply stating a position on an issue to a mass audience during a television speech, debate, or interview, the candidate could ask a question and invite comments. Large numbers of viewers could press buttons on their television sets, phones, or computers and respond

immediately to the candidate. This rapid and somewhat personal interaction might allow candidates the opportunity for repositioning their ideas and might also encourage voters to modify or change their beliefs regarding the candidate.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, the effect on campaign style would be enormous. Incumbents and challengers alike could have the benefits of person-to-person campaigning without ever leaving the television studio or their office. In addition, the determination of public opinion on a given issue would no longer be subject to the intervention of a third party (e.g., pollsters or the press). Mass media campaigning would, in effect, become true two-way communication.

Although interactive television has not yet been a part of a candidate's communication strategy, by the 1988 presidential election, it had spilled over to elective politics. During the Democratic Iowa caucus debates, eighty-seven participants were linked to a computer by a small box with a dial. As they watched the candidates' debate, participants were asked to register continuously their feelings about the speakers by moving the dial on a rising scale of one to seven on traits such as leadership, speaking ability, experience, and qualifications.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-term elections of 1994, congresspersons, state and local government officials, and the Democratic and Republican national committees were communicating on computerized bulletin boards. Online campaigning is inexpensive and extremely time-efficient. In addition, voters have direct access and interaction with representatives and candidates in cyberspace without the filter of the media.

In 1992 and 1996, and again in 2000, the major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) cut their investment in covering the early campaign. As the data from a tracking study by the Center for Public Affairs illustrated, the evening news programs of NBC, CBS, and ABC together "ran 576 stories about the election over fifteen and a half hours of prime news time. During the comparable period in 1996 they had aired 737 stories over twenty-two and three-quarters hours."<sup>25</sup> Perhaps network coverage was reduced because of what appears to be a decline in public interest in network news programs. A 1998 survey from the Pew Research Center showed that the number of Americans who regularly watch the nightly news on ABC, CBS, and NBC declined from 60 percent in 1993 to 38 percent in 1998.<sup>26</sup>

The reduction in network coverage paved the way for a new kind of presidential campaign coverage in the 1990s and 2000s, one in which nontraditional popular culture media grew in importance. For candidates, the popular media formats presented opportunities not experienced in the past. For example, talk show hosts or citizens who called in asked questions that were much "softer" than those typically asked by the national media. Moreover, there were rarely follow-up questions, and even when there were, no established journalist was there to push the candidate on evasions, contra-

dictions, or half-truths.<sup>27</sup> There were also instances in the presidential elections of 1992, 1996, and 2000 in which the tabloids set the agenda for network news by printing a sensationalized story—for example, the allegations of Paula Jones that while governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton made unwanted sexual advances toward her, or the report from a Maine television station during the last five days of the 2000 campaign that when George W. Bush was thirty, he had been arrested while driving in Maine and had pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of driving while intoxicated. Such stories provoked candidate response and thus made coverage of the story "necessary" for the mainstream news media. It may well be that such mainstream news coverage of "interesting" versus "important" stories, as well as the increased dominance of popular culture media, has contributed to a growing public skepticism about the trustworthiness of the press. A 1998 *Newsweek* poll found that 42 percent of those surveyed believe only some of what they read and hear in the news media.<sup>28</sup> (Credibility is also an issue with the Internet in that 58 percent of Internet users believe most online information is accurate and reliable, whereas only one-third perceive half of the information as credible.)

One more difference regarding the use of media, which began in 1996 and continued in the 2000 election campaign, was that candidates came to recognize the potential of the local news stations. Beginning with New Hampshire, candidates did many of their satellite interviews with the anchors and reporters of local stations rather than with network commentators and journalists. They were able to do so because the networks were no longer able to control all of the pictures taken by their camera crews. For years, CBS, NBC, and ABC had refused to distribute pictures of national news events to their local stations until such pictures had first appeared in network newscasts. With the arrival of CNN, and later the Fox Network and CNBC, this policy began to change. To make a profit, the cable networks started selling their pictures to local stations throughout the world.

Another technology that has made an impact on political campaigning is the proliferation of household video cassette recorders (VCRs). The practice of distributing campaign videos to provide primarily biographic information and to aid in fund-raising started with George H. W. Bush's 1980 effort in the Republican primaries. Beginning in the 1988 campaign and continuing through the 2000 campaign, each of the presidential hopefuls produced videos that were designed to introduce themselves to voters in the early primary and caucus states and to serve as vehicles for fund-raising. For example, Bob Dole's biographical video, entitled "Bob Dole: An American Hero," pictured his hometown, friends, and family members, as well as the struggles he endured, including his war wounds and his family's poverty. The biographical video used to introduce Al Gore for his acceptance speech at the 2000 Democratic Nominating Convention was composed primarily

of pictures taken by his wife Tipper Gore. But as videos can be used to build a candidate's public persona, so, too, can they undo or destroy an opponent's credibility. This power was graphically demonstrated during the 1988 surfacing period when Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, a Democratic presidential contender, "borrowed" a stirring soliloquy from British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock without crediting him. Shortly after Biden gave the speech, the *New York Times* received an "attack video" showing the Biden and the Kinnock speeches back-to-back. The *Times* ran the story on page 1, and the video was shown on the evening newscasts. The video set in motion a chain of events that within eleven days drove Biden from the race.

The Internet is another technological innovation beginning to influence the way in which candidates seek our votes. For example, although each of the 1996 presidential candidates had a home page, it was the campaign 2000 presidential hopefuls who pushed the technology in new directions as they used their home pages to disseminate information and increase support. In 1996, President Bill Clinton's campaign site drew 5,500 volunteers and raised between \$5,000 and \$7,500.<sup>29</sup> That year also saw the first virtual gubernatorial campaign. A Vermont Independent circulated his petitions and stumped on the Internet (although in a losing effort) "to prove that the future of politics is on-line, and you don't have to have a lot of money."<sup>30</sup>

The increase in the use of the Internet between the 1996 presidential campaign and the 2000 campaign was dramatic. By 1998, over sixty-two million people were regular "surfers" on the Internet, and 97 percent of them owned a home computer. In another survey of Internet users, approximately 23 percent said that they used the Internet for information on political candidates. With so many Americans using the Internet for political information, it is little wonder that a survey conducted by *Campaigns & Elections* magazine found that 63.3 percent of local, state, and national candidates for political office had websites in the 1998 election.<sup>31</sup> And by 2001, 72.3 percent of Americans had online access, which was an increase from 66.9 percent in 2000. In fact by 2001, Americans spent 9.8 hours per week using the Internet, which was up from 9.4 hours in 2000.

Although it is impossible to know just what impact new technologies will ultimately have on political campaigns in the future, as we have seen before, innovations in transportation and communication have an infinite capacity to alter the strategies that candidates use to seek political office. As such, they are an important consideration in any examination of campaign style.

### Styles and Strategies of Campaigns

Essentially, campaign styles are sets of communication strategies employed at times by all candidates, whether they run for president, mayor, governor,

or legislator. Moreover, those who hold office may campaign in the manner of those who do not, just as those who challenge may adopt strategies of incumbency. In other words, those candidates who are incumbents are not restricted to a specific set of incumbency strategies any more than challengers are confined to a particular set of challenger strategies. In fact, candidates frequently combine strategies of one style with strategies of another so that there are times during the course of one contest where an individual contender may assume a rhetorical posture normally associated with incumbency campaigning and at other times may appear to be campaigning as a challenger. This combination may well be a result of the seasonless electoral process discussed in the first and second chapters. As candidates extend the length of the campaign, no one style is likely to remain appropriate for the duration. New events, as well as changes in conditions, force modification in the manner of pursuit. While in February an attack on the incumbent's economic policy might be appropriate, by August the situation may be different enough to make attack an inappropriate strategy. As such, it would be misleading to try to analyze style by only examining the practice of one candidate or one campaign. Styles (incumbency, challenger, and incumbent/challenger) are a product of whatever candidates and their staffs believe is needed at a particular time within the context of their particular campaign. Therefore, the best way to understand them is to determine the composition of each—that is, to catalog their strategies.

### Incumbency Style

Incumbency campaigning in the United States is at least as old as the first presidential incumbent, George Washington, who ran for reelection in 1792. Its various strategies have been used by almost all who have sought election to any level of government. Given its longevity and frequent use, one might assume it would have been defined long ago and its characteristics carefully delineated. While that is not the case, incumbency has been considered a "symbolic resource"<sup>32</sup> and the "Rose Garden Strategy."<sup>33</sup> Although each idea is useful in attempting to understand what it is that candidates do and say when they appear to be "running as an incumbent," each is nonetheless incomplete. Incumbency campaigning is a blend of both symbolic and pragmatic communication strategies designed to make any candidate appear as both good enough for the office sought and possessing the office (an assumed incumbency stance). This is not an easy task. We know that image creation and maintenance take significant amounts of skill, time, and money.

But developing a credible incumbency style is well worth the effort. The results of countless elections indicate that incumbents tend to win. For example, during the twentieth century, only five presidents have lost their

reelection bids, and congressional incumbents, especially those in the House of Representatives, almost always defeat their challengers. In 1996, just one incumbent U.S. senator was unseated, while the rate of incumbency reelections in the U.S. House was 94 percent.<sup>34</sup>

However, 1998 stands out, by far, as the year of the incumbent. Out of 401 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives where the incumbents were running for reelection, 395—that is, all but 6 of the incumbents—were returned to office. The success of incumbency also benefited the U.S. Senate where all but three of the twenty-nine incumbents were reelected. Of the three senators who lost in 1998, two of them, New York senator Alphonse D'Amato and North Carolina senator Lauch Faircloth, were strident critics of President Clinton. The other losing senator, Carol Mosely-Braun from Illinois, who was first elected in 1992, lost to Republican millionaire Peter Fitzgerald, in part because he was successful in highlighting several missteps by Mosely-Braun during her term of office. Given this kind of success, it is not surprising that political scientist R. F. Fenno has suggested that incumbency is “a resource to be employed, an opportunity to be exploited.”<sup>35</sup> The 2000 election stood out as yet another incredible year for incumbents. In the 2000 election cycle, 403 incumbents of the House of Representatives sought reelection, and all but 9 won. In other words, incumbents enjoyed a 98 percent “success rate.”<sup>36</sup>

With this understanding, we now consider the specific strategies that candidates employ when they seek the advantages of incumbency. The first four are symbolic in nature; the remaining eleven are pragmatic or instrumental.

### Symbolic Strategies

In exploring the symbolic characteristics of incumbency campaigning, we are, in essence, discussing presidential candidates because there is no other elective office for which the public has the same kind of feelings. In one sense the presidency can be thought of as a focus of impressions and beliefs that exist in our mind—a kind of “collage of images, hopes, habits, and intentions shared by the nation who legitimizes the office and reacts to its occupants.”<sup>37</sup> Viewed from a related perspective, when we speak of the presidency, we are dealing with the myth of the office, the image we have possessed since childhood of the one institution that stands for truth, honor, justice, and integrity. We have a conception of an individual and an office that in ennobling each other, ennoble us. Perhaps Theodore White described it best when he wrote:

Somewhere in American life there is at least one man who stands for law, the President. That faith surmounts all daily cynicism, all evidence or suspicion of wrong-doing by lesser leaders, all corruptions, all vulgarities, all the ugly com-

promises of daily striving and ambition. That faith holds that all men are created equal before the law and protected by it; and that no matter how the faith may be betrayed elsewhere, at one particular point—the Presidency—justice will be done beyond prejudice, beyond rancor, beyond the possibilities of a fix.<sup>38</sup>

People may debate the character, quality, and personality of the men who have filled the office, and public opinion polls may indicate dissatisfaction with the performance of an incumbent, but the presidency is, for most citizens, an idealized institution, headed by a single visible individual through whom it is possible to grasp a “cognitive handle” or an understanding of “political goings on.”<sup>39</sup>

In this context, then, the identity of a particular president is irrelevant; the concern is the office itself and the symbolic role it can play in a campaign.

### Symbolic Trappings of the Office

The first strategy is the use of symbolic trappings to transmit the absolute strength and importance of the office. The presidency stands for power, and therefore incumbents take on the persona of the powerful. They are surrounded by large numbers of carefully trained and “important-looking” bodyguards who appear to anticipate their every move; their song (played when they enter or leave a public ceremony) is “Hail to the Chief”; incumbents are addressed by title, never by name; when they travel, a whole contingent of Secret Service, media reporters, technicians, and lesser governmental officials accompany them in a caravan of planes and limousines; their home, although the property of “the people,” is heavily guarded and off limits to all who have no official business to conduct with them or their staff; incumbents can be in instant communication with the leader of any other country; they serve as commander in chief of all armed services; incumbents can command nationwide media time; and they are always close to a small black bag, the contents of which provide them the capability to blow up the world.

Thus, it is little wonder that those who have campaigned against a president have objected to the continual and conscious use of devices that remind voters that they are seeing and hearing “the president,” as opposed to “just another politician.” For example, during the 1984 campaign, President Reagan changed the location of his televised press conferences. He stood before an open doorway in the East Room of the White House that reveals a long, elegant corridor. The cameras recorded a majestic setting and a stately exit that dramatized the importance of the office, and it served to remind the audience that they were listening to the president of the United States.

### Legitimacy of the Office

The second strategy involves not so much what incumbents do—that is, the use of specific tangible symbols to remind voters of their power—but an intangible tool that only they possess and about which their challengers cannot even object. The presidency stands for legitimacy, and therefore the person who holds the office is perceived as the natural and logical leader. In other words, no matter who the incumbent may be (or regardless of the incumbent's current rating in the public opinion polls), the president is accorded a kind of sociopolitical legitimacy—a public trust. As one theorist has argued, we place our faith and trust in the hands of our leaders because they project an image that seduces us into participating in the comforting illusion that through rigid adherence to the constituted ideals of the society, they can guide us through whatever possible troubles the future might present.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, their position provides automatic legitimacy during a campaign in that they, unlike any of their opponents, are, from the beginning, considered legitimate candidates for the job.

### Competency and the Office

The third strategy is also an intangible tool that comes with the office. The presidency stands for competency; therefore, the person who holds the office can easily convey that impression. To trust in the president's competence is to accept the incumbent as a symbol "that problems can be solved without a basic restructuring of social institutions and without the threat a radical reordering poses both to the contented and to the anxious."<sup>41</sup> In other words, when we attribute a sense of competency to the president, it provides us with reassurance that all can be right. We want to believe that the person who is president is capable (after all, we elected the president in the first place).

As a matter of fact, our feelings about the office itself are so strong that whatever a specific president has done with regard to individual issues, a large number of people will always be supportive. For example, each year since World War II, every president has been ranked by U.S. citizens as one of the ten most admired persons in the world.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps a reason for this is, as Murray Edelman suggests, that "public issues fade from attention after a period in the limelight even when they are not 'solved' because they cannot remain dramatic and exciting for long and the media then have economic and psychological reasons to softpedal them."<sup>43</sup>

For whatever reasons or in whatever manner goodwill is retained, our point is simply that any president possesses a sense of competency that none of his rivals can share. It is, of course, a distinct advantage of the office.

### Charisma and the Office

The final symbolic strategy, like the first three, is dependent on the ability of the office to transfer its persona to the incumbent. However, this one is not an intangible resource in that it has had deliberate use since presidents began barnstorming the country for their own elections. The presidency stands for excitement, a kind of patriotic glamour, and therefore the person who holds the office takes on these characteristics. In no other way is the mystique of the presidency more visible than it is during a presidential campaign visit almost anywhere in the country. When the president comes to town (advance and security personnel have already been there for at least a week), roads are blocked, airports are closed, children are dismissed from school, bands play, television cameras and reporters are everywhere, hundreds or thousands of people converge along the streets or at the airport to greet the president; the very sight of the magnificent *Air Force One* produces a sense of awe, and for a while, we are participants in a warm and patriotic festival. It matters little whether or not we plan to vote for the incumbent; regardless of how dull and unimaginative the president may have been before living in the White House, once there, the office itself envelops the president in its aura or charisma.

Although campaign tours were not undertaken by incumbents (at least during the election period) until Herbert Hoover paved the way, their symbolic power has not been lost on any of the presidents who have succeeded him. The reasons for their trips have been as varied as have been their modes of transportation. For example, in 1948, Harry Truman whistle-stopped his way across thirty-two thousand miles to blame what he termed the "do-nothing, good-for-nothing 80th Congress" for the nation's problems. In 1956, Dwight Eisenhower, in spite of two international crises, felt he had to undertake an extensive tour through the southern states to blunt his opponent's charges that he was too old and too sick to be president. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson barnstormed his way across the country, in part because he felt a psychological need to be "out with the people" and experience their warmth and acceptance of him. In 1976, Jimmy Carter boarded the paddle-wheel riverboat *Delta Queen* and traveled the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, campaigning at each stop, in an almost frantic effort to restore his popularity with voters. In 1984, Ronald Reagan whistle-stopped through several states riding the same presidential caboose Harry Truman rode in 1948. In 1992, over two thousand people turned out to shake hands with George H. W. Bush at a mall in Concord, New Hampshire, and to hear him explain why he should be reelected in spite of a depressed economy. In 1996, Bill Clinton's fourteen-bus caravan was greeted by a crowd of twenty-five thousand in Paducah, Kentucky, during a week-long trip that Clinton stated allowed him "to see the people I've been working for for four years."<sup>44</sup> And

in 2000, the sitting vice president and Democratic nominee, Al Gore, and his vice presidential nominee, Senator Joseph Lieberman, departed on a boat trip down the Mississippi River after the Democratic Nominating Convention. The purpose of their trip was to get a postconvention public opinion and media coverage boost by taking their campaign and new partnership to towns in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri. Their trip emulated the Bush and Quayle boat trip to New Orleans after the 1988 Republican Nominating Convention.

For the most part, other incumbents have used campaign trips for the same reasons. They have known that the glamour and excitement, the drama and pageantry of a presidential visit will, even if just for a short time, transfer the charisma of the office to them. As such, the trips are well worth the effort.

### Pragmatic Strategies

In turning to the pragmatic strategies of incumbency, it is important to note that they are more universal than are their symbolic counterparts because they can be and have been employed by candidates who are neither presidents nor, in some cases, even incumbents. Certainly, some strategies depend on the legitimate power that holding an office provides, but others have been used by candidates who only borrow the mantle or style of the incumbent.

Strategies that are examined in this section are the following:

- Creating pseudoevents to attract and control media attention
- Making appointments to state and federal jobs as well as appointments to state and national party committees
- Creating special city, state, or national task forces to investigate areas of public concern
- Appropriating federal funds/grants
- Consulting or negotiating with world leaders
- Manipulating the economy or other important domestic issues
- Endorsements by party and other important leaders
- Emphasizing accomplishments
- Creating and maintaining an "above the political trenches" posture
- Depending on surrogates for the campaign trail
- Interpreting and intensifying a foreign policy problem so that it becomes an international crisis

### Creating Pseudoevents

As the use of public relations experts and publicists has increased in political campaigns, so, too, has the frequency of hyped or manufactured news.

Essentially, *pseudoevents* are defined as occurrences that differ from "real" events in that they are planned, planted, or incited for the primary purpose of being reported or reproduced.<sup>45</sup>

While all candidates use pseudoevents to try to capture media attention, incumbents have more success because they are in a better position to create them. For example, a governor or state senator may be featured on the evening television and radio news throughout the state because of an announced "major" initiative in attracting a specific corporation to the state and thus creating new jobs. A member of Congress may receive headlines from appointment to a special committee or commission created by the president. Moreover, incumbents have many opportunities for participation in ceremonious occasions—events that are sure to bring the local media. The ceremonies can be as different as the groundbreaking for a new government building to the announcement that a special day has been set aside to honor the city's firefighters. But each can be hyped up enough to guarantee publicity for the candidate.

However, not only do incumbents have more opportunities to attract the attention of the media; they are better equipped to control the kind of coverage they receive. Perhaps a politician whose experience provides one of the best examples of what we mean is the ex-mayor of New York. During his years as mayor, Edward I. Koch learned how to control the New York media. He was seen on television virtually every evening; most of the time it was as the leading participant in a special occasion or ceremony. (New York is a big city, and therefore many events can be important enough to make the mayor's attendance seem appropriate.) Equally important was the way in which Koch controlled the kind of coverage he received. During the 1985 Democratic mayoral primaries, the mayor's opponents issued frequent press statements attacking various administration programs. In response, Koch called press conferences on those days to announce new initiatives city government was taking in such areas as housing starts and education reforms or even to announce park dedications. According to Koch, "my own comments were getting covered in long news stories, while the charges of my opponents were reduced to little metro briefs deep inside the paper. This is the power of incumbency."<sup>46</sup>

In 1996, the Clinton administration was successful in drawing favorable and widely publicized coverage of presidential initiatives—initiatives that had been frequently discussed by Republican candidates. Shortly after the 1994 election when the Democrats lost control of Congress, the president and his staff identified issues congressional Republicans had championed and began writing their own legislative proposals. Some of the proposals received daily media coverage. For example, within a two-day period, Clinton's announcements of initiatives to help schools and to track the illegal sale of guns made the front pages of *USA Today* and the *New York Times*,

respectively. A month earlier, ABC reported on the president's announcement of a program to combat infectious diseases and his intention to "restate his belief" that cigarettes are addictive. The wide publicity received criticism from Senator Dole, whose campaign released a statement that Clinton and his aides were "getting away with refried beans and in some cases very thin gruel, and getting coverage that makes it seem like a full platter of policy."<sup>47</sup> Clinton, in other words, used the media exposure his incumbency guaranteed to seize the rhetorical agenda for the 1996 presidential campaign. However, his heir apparent in campaign 2000, Vice President Al Gore, threw away most of the incumbency strategies to which he was entitled because of his fear of being too closely associated to the scandals surrounding President Clinton. He, in fact, never even accepted the president's offer to speak for him in any state, including Arkansas, Tennessee, and Florida—places where Clinton was popular and states whose electoral college votes Gore and Lieberman eventually lost.

In short, incumbents have at their disposal the ability to create pseudo-events that not only generate media exposure but allow some measure of control over the coverage.

#### *Making Appointments to Jobs and Committees*

One of the most common yet powerful incumbency strategies revolves around the ability to appoint personal or political friends—or potential friends—to local, state, and federal jobs or to give them key positions on party committees. Although patronage has been condemned by reformers in both political parties, it continues largely because it is so advantageous to everyone concerned. First, it allows candidates (and is not limited to incumbents in that all contenders can hold out the "promise" of appointment) to reward those who have helped them in the past. Second, it creates potential friends or at least puts people in a position of gratitude. Third, and undoubtedly most significant, it places supporters in key positions that may well be important in later stages of the campaign or even in subsequent elections. As such, few candidates, from county commissioner to governor to president, have failed to use this strategy.

#### *Creating Special Task Forces*

Modern candidates understand the need not only to determine which issues are of concern to the voters in their city, district, or state but to speak to those concerns. One way to do this is to announce the formation of a special task force whose purpose is to investigate the issue/problem and make recommendations to the candidate regarding steps or actions to be taken in the future. The strategy is employed by incumbents as well as those who are not

incumbents because the act of forming the task force is all that is really required to create the illusion that the candidate is concerned about the problem.

The primary advantage of the strategy is that the candidate is perceived as a person who understands and cares about those issues important to a particular constituency. However, a second benefit is that the candidate is in the position to postpone taking a stand on a controversial issue—one that might create as many enemies as supporters. Thus, every election year seems to bring a plethora of specially created task forces composed of concerned community/state/national citizens who investigate topics as varied as mental health facilities and taxes for a new sewer system.

#### *Appropriating Funds/Grants*

Absolutely no incumbency strategy is less subtle or more powerful than appropriating special grants to "cooperative" (politically supportive) public officials for their cities and states. It is reserved only for incumbents (in that the strategy does not include promises for the future) and is viewed best at the presidential level, although it is certainly done at state and local levels as well.

Although every modern president since Franklin Roosevelt has had a prodigious amount of discretionary money to distribute in the form of federal grants, by the election of 1980, the amount totaled \$80 billion. Like his predecessors, Jimmy Carter was determined to use it to aid him in the primaries—especially the early contests when the campaign of Edward Kennedy was still viewed as a threat. The money was employed to reward those public officials who announced their preference for the president, to gain a public endorsement where there had not been one, or to punish those who denied or withdrew support. For example, prior to the Illinois primary, Jane Byrne, mayor of Chicago, was told by the White House that U.S. Air Force facilities at O'Hare Field would be relocated to allow Chicago to expand its major airport. However, after the mayor announced her support of Senator Kennedy over the president, the secretary of transportation said that the cabinet had "lost confidence in Mayor Byrne, and would look for opportunities to deny transportation funds to Chicago and its mayor."<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the Carter White House went into the 1980 campaign determined to "grease" its way through the primaries. Florida (in advance of the Democratic straw primary) received a \$1.1 billion loan guarantee to an electric cooperative, \$29.9 billion in grants for public housing in various counties, and \$31 million for housing projects for the elderly throughout the state. Prior to its primary, New Hampshire received funds for such projects as a four-lane highway from Manchester to Portsmouth and a special commuter train from Concord to Boston.<sup>49</sup> In 1992, President Bush made extensive

use of his power to allocate funds. For example, government contracts were granted in states where jobs were affected. And after Hurricane Andrew swept through Florida, massive federal resources were promised to the disaster area. In 1996, President Clinton made extensive use of his power to allocate funds. For example, federal funds were provided to enlarge local police forces throughout the country. And, after Massachusetts suffered severe flooding from the "Great Rain of '96," it was immediately announced that funds would be made available by the government to those counties hit the hardest.

Is the appropriation of funds a successful incumbency strategy? While it is impossible to claim the effect of any one element in a phenomenon as complex as a primary election, President Carter soundly defeated Kennedy in New Hampshire and virtually annihilated him in the Florida and Illinois primaries. On the other hand, the emergency federal funds President Bush promised to Florida ultimately worked against him because Florida citizens said it was too little and arrived too late.

#### *Consulting with World Leaders*

While at first glance consultation with world leaders may appear to be a strategy possible for only presidential incumbents, the fact is that this strategy is employed by any number of governors and members of Congress as they attempt to build their credentials for reelection. Governors extend invitations to athletic teams or artists and may even negotiate with foreign businesses corporations and governments about the prospect of building a major factory in the state. Members of Congress take frequent junkets overseas in the effort to illustrate their power and importance to voters in their districts or states.

In addition to its use by incumbents, the strategy is employed by challengers who must also build credentials and convey a sense of their individual importance. Moreover, its use may be even more crucial for them because they do not possess the real authority or power of the incumbent. Thus, a meeting with foreign governmental leaders grants at least a sense of legitimacy because it illustrates acknowledgment and a kind of acceptance into an important and official group of leaders. For example, in 1992, challenger Bill Clinton met Russian president Boris Yeltsin to assure him of his support for the multibillion-dollar aid package for Russia that was then pending in Congress. Following the meeting, the governor described how the half-hour chat with the Russian leader was a meeting of the minds.<sup>50</sup> In 1998, in anticipation of the Iowa caucus for presidential campaign 2000, Republican hopeful Malcolm (Steve) Forbes Jr. brought former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher to Iowa to campaign by his side. And in 2000, Elizabeth Dole, who was campaigning for the Republican nomina-

tion, had many international contacts, thanks to her husband's acquaintances during his years as Senate majority leader and as the 1996 Republican presidential nominee and her own years as president of the American Red Cross. In fact, to help demonstrate her international credentials, she traveled to Macedonia to hear " firsthand," she said, about the problems confronting the refugees.

While significant to congressional and gubernatorial candidates, a trip abroad—especially to Russia, China, or the Middle East—is virtually a prerequisite for potential presidential contenders, particularly those whose previous experiences have not included "official" foreign travel and consultation with government officials. At the very least, it allows them to work their trips into their discourse with such phrases as "in my meeting with the prime minister, I was told that . . ." But even more important, the strategy provides those candidates who have absolutely no foreign policy experience the appearance of seeming to be a part of or involved in international affairs. As such, it is a useful strategy of the incumbency style.

#### *Manipulating Important Domestic Issues*

As a number of these strategies illustrate, incumbents have considerable power, which is, of course, one of the reasons they are difficult to defeat and challengers are so eager to assume their campaign style. However, the manipulation or management of important issues is one strategy that can be assumed only by the incumbent.

For example, throughout the years, the economy has been a primary area of presidential management. One way this has been done is timing economic benefits to specific groups within the electorate to ensure their vote in the election. Political scientist Frank Kessler has pointed to the following Social Security incident during the 1972 presidential campaign as a case in point:

Checks went out in October 1972, one month before the elections, with the following memo enclosed and personally approved by President Nixon to each of the 24.7 million Social Security recipients: "Your social security payment has been increased by 20% starting with this month's check by a new statute enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon on July 1, 1972. The President also signed into law a provision which will allow your social security benefits to increase automatically as the cost of living goes up."<sup>51</sup>

In using this strategy, presidents have not limited themselves to economic manipulation; other issues have been managed. For example, President Bush took a number of actions designed to win voter approval in 1992, including supporting the sale of F-15 fighters to Saudi Arabia in time to announce it to defense workers in Missouri,<sup>52</sup> signing a bill making carjacking a federal

crime,<sup>53</sup> announcing to farmers a complicated plan for using corn-based ethanol fuel as an antidote for urban smog,<sup>54</sup> vetoing a bill that would regulate cable prices—saying that it benefited special interests rather than the public,<sup>55</sup> and retooling training programs that he said could be paid for without new taxes. And in 1996, in an effort to boost his campaign, President Clinton vetoed a bill that would have outlawed some late-term abortions,<sup>56</sup> signed legislation aimed at preventing gay marriages,<sup>57</sup> transferred U.S. Border Patrol agents from Texas to California (though illegal immigration is a major problem in both states),<sup>58</sup> vetoed bills that would place new limits on the ability of Americans to pursue civil court claims,<sup>59</sup> and signed a bill that increased the minimum wage.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Receiving Endorsements from Other Leaders*

Although the growth of primaries has reduced their importance, endorsements are an attempt to identify and link the candidate with already-established, highly respected, and generally acknowledged leaders. The idea is that endorsement by respected leaders signifies that the candidate is already part of their group and should therefore also be thought of as a leader—in other words, credibility by association. Obviously, this perception can be crucial for a nonincumbent who wishes to adopt the incumbency style. It is, of course, equally significant for the incumbent because continued acceptance by other governmental or political leaders is one way of advancing the perception of a successful term of office. Similarly, candidates hope they receive no endorsements from individuals or groups who are not perceived positively by large segments of society because negative association is also possible. For example, during the 1960 presidential campaign, Richard Nixon was endorsed by the president of the Teamsters Union, Jimmy Hoffa. Because Hoffa was already thought of as a “racketeer” (or worse) by many citizens, it was an endorsement that Nixon tried to ignore. When reporters questioned John Kennedy about his reaction to Hoffa’s endorsement of Nixon rather than himself, Kennedy responded humorously that he guessed he was just lucky, which of course reinforces our point.

#### *Emphasizing Accomplishments*

One of those strategies forming the core of the incumbency style is emphasizing accomplishments. Candidates must be able to demonstrate tangible accomplishments during their term of office if they are incumbents or in some related aspect of public service if they only assume the style. This is, of course, the reason that incumbents go to great lengths to list for voters all that they have done while in office. For example, during the 1992 presidential campaign, President Bush took credit for many of the events that

happened in the world during his term of office, including the end of the Cold War.<sup>61</sup> In discussing United States foreign policy accomplishments, he said:

Germany was unified. Central America was transformed through a policy based on free elections and reconciliation. The Soviet Union was dissolved peacefully and groundbreaking arms control agreements were reached. Iraq was defeated after the U.S. assembled an unprecedented international coalition to prosecute the war, opening the way for peace among the Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis.<sup>62</sup>

The strategy is simple as long as the deeds exist. The difficulty occurs when there have been few accomplishments or when major problems have arisen that overshadow positive contributions (taxes are higher than they were before the incumbent took office; inflation is worse; unemployment has not been reduced). When this happens, the strategy becomes more complex in that the incumbent must either deny that the current problems are important ones (normally an impossible task for even the most persuasive) or blame them on someone else—even on uncontrollable forces. Blaming someone, scapegoating, is the path normally chosen. Examples are as numerous as candidates. State legislators blame the governor, governors blame the federal government (especially Congress), presidents blame Congress, and, surprisingly enough, members of Congress often blame other congressional members. A case that aptly illustrates the practice of blaming others is the 1996 budget impasse that led to partial shutdowns of the federal government. President Clinton blamed the Republican majority of Congress for not compromising, and the Republicans blamed the president for their inability to reach agreement. A budget was finally agreed upon in April 1997, but by then the government had lost some \$2 billion in uncollected taxes.<sup>63</sup>

The practice of casting blame elsewhere is certainly not a new variation of the accomplishment strategy. However, its most interesting use is by members of Congress, especially the House. Popular perceptions of Congress are not high. For example, in 1998, a Gallup Poll found that less than 45 percent of the public expressed confidence in the U.S. Congress and approved of the way they were doing their job.<sup>64</sup> In fact, surveys on congressional job approval and disapproval ratings have shown a trend of disapproval for decades. However, despite these feelings, congressional incumbents win the overwhelming majority of their elections. One of the reasons for this paradox is that when individual representatives seek reelection, they disassociate themselves or even “run against” the institution of which they are a member. They talk about their accomplishments rather than those of Congress, and as two political communication scholars have

noted, they play up the negative "myths" (Congress is a kind of shadowy process in which sinister figures operate) while projecting themselves as hardworking and honest people who work against evil.<sup>65</sup> In this way, then, even when genuine accomplishments may be few, scapegoating makes the strategy possible.

#### *Creating an Image of Being above the Political Trenches*

Another strategy that is at the center of incumbency style is the technique in which candidates try to create the image that they are somehow removed from politics. Essentially, the strategy is composed of any combination of the following three tactics (each designed to create the impression that the contender is a statesman rather than a politician):

- Appear to be aloof from the hurly-burly of political battle—the office has sought them, so they run because of a sense of love of country and duty.
- Fail to acknowledge publicly the existence of any opponent—candidates may have opponents, but statesmen do not.
- Sustain political silence (absolutely refrain from any personal campaign trips or confrontations with opponents, including not answering any charges or attacks or discussing partisan issues).<sup>66</sup>

While portions of this strategy are used by contemporary candidates, it has been around for a long time. As a matter of fact, its progenitor was George Washington. He did not have to create a nonpolitical or statesman image, because he was not a politician and he had been reluctant to become president. In spite of this, for candidates who were to follow (at least presidential candidates), he bequeathed a legacy of "being above politics," in a sense, conveying the attitude that being political would somehow "dirty" the office. Thus, for many years, the public picked presidents without ever seeing or hearing what their ideas or policies were—at least during the time in which they were candidates. With only two exceptions,<sup>67</sup> no major party candidates, even after formal nomination, personally solicited votes. They were not expected to (even after transportation networks improved), because the prevailing attitude was that the office must seek the person; that is, the appearance of modest reluctance—of being above politics—had to be maintained.

Stephen Douglas was the first to break the taboo in 1860 when he undertook announced campaign speaking tours around the country on behalf of his own candidacy. Although other Democratic candidates followed his example, none became president until Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1912. Republicans remembered Washington's example longer and

eschewed mass campaigning (campaign speaking tours around the country on behalf of their own candidacy) until the 1932 campaign, when an incumbent was faced with a problem of such magnitude that he felt he had to travel the United States explaining why he should not be blamed for the Great Depression.

Thus, this strategy has a long history, and its use, in combination with the next two strategies, continues to play a central role in the development and maintenance of incumbency style.

#### *Use of Surrogates on the Campaign Trail*

This strategy is closely related to the last one in that it is possible for candidates to assume an above-politics posture because others are overtly campaigning for them while they stay home being nonpolitical. While the strategy is employed by a wide spectrum of candidates, it is the sophisticated use by presidential incumbents since the 1970s that allows us to see most clearly the technique at work.

For example, in 1972, Richard Nixon depended on the campaign tours of over forty-nine surrogates (including members of his family, cabinet officers, and other high-level government officials) while he stayed in the White House during most of the fall campaign against George McGovern. As a matter of fact, Nixon was so intent on creating the illusion of a hardworking, nonpolitical statesman that not only did he rarely take a political trip or make a speech in his own behalf, but when asked once by a reporter about his campaign, he cut off questioning with the remark "Let the political people talk on that."<sup>68</sup>

The use of surrogates did not end with Richard Nixon's election. As a matter of fact, it became more pronounced, especially when the media dubbed it the "Rose Garden" strategy during the stay-at-home period of Gerald Ford's campaign in 1976. What they meant was that for weeks on end, as part of a specifically designed plan, Ford did not leave the White House to campaign. Members of his family, his cabinet, and hundreds of Republican Party faithful were out on the hustings for him as he stayed close to the White House and acted "presidential." In addition, as part of the plan, the media were alerted several times each day to witness pseudoevents (the president's welcome to visiting dignitaries or his signature on legislation), most of which occurred in the area adjacent to the Oval Office, the Rose Garden (thus the name). During the midterm elections of 1982, the Republican National Committee developed a program called "Surrogate 82" in which all cabinet members were required to devote fifteen days to campaign activities.<sup>69</sup> But what is most interesting about surrogates and rose gardens is that the strategy is a direct descendant of the "Front Porch" campaigns used by Republicans many years earlier.

In 1888, the grandson of Old Tippecanoe, Benjamin Harrison, was the Republican candidate for president. The party believed it had lost the 1884 election because of the mistakes their candidate made. Therefore, it was decided that Harrison would campaign from his home in Indianapolis against the Democratic incumbent, giving rehearsed and dignified speeches to delegations of visitors who were invited to hear him speak while other party leaders toured the country on his behalf. In other words, the challenger would not only appear presidential but have little opportunity to err. Thus, when Harrison won, the Front Porch, or Rose Garden, strategy was born.

As is the case with most campaign strategies, success means repetition. So in 1896, Republicans went back to the porch with a new candidate and increased zest for a campaign style that was in stark contrast to the "swing around the circle" effort of the Democrats.

Although William McKinley never left his porch in Canton, Ohio, he nonetheless was part of a more vigorous campaign to return the White House to the Republicans than had been conducted for Harrison. Hundreds of visiting delegations were invited to visit his home and hear him speak. He gave as many as twelve carefully prepared speeches a day (each on a single issue specifically directed to the interests of the delegation), and copies were supplied to all major papers. Thus, while remaining at home, McKinley received daily nationwide press coverage—more, in fact, than did his opponent. In addition, 1,400 surrogates were sent out from party campaign headquarters to speak for him all across the country. With all this effort, McKinley defeated William Jennings Bryan.

In part because of their victories the first two times, Republicans returned to the porch for the 1920 election. While the Democratic candidate toured the country, the Republican managers sat Warren G. Harding on the front porch in Marion, Ohio (where day after day he delivered quiet and dignified platitudes about common sense and clean living), and then supplemented the porch performances with touring surrogates. Once again, the strategy worked as Democratic contender James Cox lost in the worst defeat a presidential candidate had known.

With this kind of success, it should now be easy to understand why front porches (currently called rose gardens) and surrogates have remained popular with modern presidential candidates.

#### *Interpreting or Intensifying Foreign Policy Problems into International Crises*

Although variations of the strategy of interpreting or intensifying foreign policy problems into international crises are employed by incumbents at all levels, it is most completely studied as it has been used by presidents. Its

purpose is simple: to create enough of a crisis situation so that voters (either because of patriotism or not wanting to change leaders at the time of an emergency) will be motivated to rally around the president. There have been many instances when the technique has been successful. In 1964, when U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin were fired upon, President Lyndon Johnson interrupted his "campaigning" to go on television, where he pledged that the United States would take rigorous defensive measures. In 1975, when a U.S. merchant ship, the *Mayaguez*, was captured by Cambodian forces, President Gerald Ford (who was about to make official his bid for reelection) used the situation to build his leadership or command credentials by ordering marines to bomb Cambodia until the *Mayaguez* crew was released. However, one of the most adept uses of the strategy occurred in the surfacing and primary stages of the 1980 campaign when President Jimmy Carter (who had two genuine foreign policy problems with the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Iran and the Soviet advances into Afghanistan) combined the use of surrogates, a nonpolitical image, and international crises to promote his renomination campaign.

Prior to the Iowa caucus and continuing through the Maine and New Hampshire primaries, Carter pledged that he would not personally campaign until the hostages in Tehran were released. Later, when the Soviets marched into Afghanistan, the president reinforced his earlier vow when he announced that because "this is the most serious crisis since the last World War," he would be unable to leave the White House to campaign in person for reelection. In addition, when other candidates (notably Senator Edward Kennedy and Governor Jerry Brown) questioned the administration's handling of the "crisis," the president completed the strategy by suggesting that attacks on his policy were "damaging to our country and to the establishment of our principles and the maintenance of them, and the achievements of our goals to keep the peace and to get our hostages released."<sup>70</sup>

Until the very last round of the primaries, the president stuck to his pledge. He emerged only rarely from the White House or Camp David and left most comments on politics to his surrogates. Carter's use of incumbency strategies was eminently successful. While giving the appearance that he was too busy trying to solve the international crises to campaign for reelection, he was defeating his opponents in the Democratic primary elections.

#### *Summary*

These, then, are the strategies that comprise the incumbency style. There are, as we have seen, a large number of them—each somewhat different from, although often dependent on, the others and each potentially effective in the hands of candidates who understand and appreciate their power. Perhaps what is most startling about them is the extent to which they work.

Normally, it takes enormous amounts of money, organization, and skill to defeat even somewhat inept incumbents. They have at their command not only the strategies we have examined but whatever privileges the office itself provides—including public awareness (visibility) and the opportunity to perform various popular and noncontroversial services for constituents. These strategies have repeatedly enabled incumbents to win reelections overwhelmingly and to win by larger margins than victorious nonincumbents. As we have said before, given all of the benefits, it is no wonder that candidates who are not incumbents often assume elements of the style.

#### *Disadvantages to Incumbency Campaigning*

But under what conditions can incumbents lose? In other words, are there burdens of the style as well as benefits? It seems to us that incumbency campaigning has at least four major disadvantages. First, and maybe most important, incumbents must run (at least in part) on their record. While they may cast blame elsewhere or minimize the scope or significance of problem areas within their administration, an effective challenger can make certain that the record of the incumbent (and shortcomings can be found in virtually all records) forms the core of the campaign rhetoric. The incumbent can be kept in a position of having to defend, justify, explain—answering rather than charging, defending rather than attacking. Being forced to run on one's record can be a severe handicap, particularly in the hands of a skilled challenger.

The second and related burden faced by many incumbents is simply that the public may blame them for all problems—whether or not they were at fault. Incumbents are in the public eye, and if the city sanitation workers refuse to pick up the garbage for a week or if the public transportation system is shut down because of weather, an accident, or striking employees, they are held accountable. At the very least, the question of competency or job effectiveness is raised in the public mind, waiting perhaps for the skilled challenger to capitalize on it.

The third disadvantage, although quite different from the first two, can be equally troublesome. The challenger is free to campaign, but incumbents must at least give the appearance of doing the job for which they have been elected. As campaign seasons become longer, this becomes more difficult. Incumbents often find it unnerving to go about the day-to-day task of administering a city, state, or nation while their opponents spend countless hours out on the hustings—garnering media attention with attacks against them and their policies. If they respond by indulging in overt campaigning, they are criticized for not doing their job. If they ignore it, they may well be accused of having no defense and being afraid to go out and face voters. In other words, it is a real damned if you do and damned if you don't situation.

Finally, because incumbents are at the center of media/public attention far more than their opponents, expectations are great regarding their "front-runner" status. If those expectations are not met, the incumbent is in trouble. Nowhere has this been more thoroughly illustrated than in presidential primary campaigns. Even when incumbents win, if they fail to meet some preconceived percentage set by the media or even by their own staffs, they have, at least in terms of media publicity, lost.

Thus, there are some burdens. Even the incumbency style does not guarantee election. With this in mind, we will now contrast the strategies of the incumbent style with those of the challenger, knowing that in each there are burdens as well as benefits.

#### **Challenger Style**

Challenger campaigning is not easy because the style demands a two-step process, the implementation of which requires not only a good deal of deliberate planning but equal portions of skill and even luck. The style can be defined as a series of communication strategies designed to persuade voters that change is needed and that the challenger is the best person to bring about the change. While the kind of change can vary all the way from shifts in a whole economic system to personality characteristics desired in the officeholder, challengers must convince the electorate that some kind of alteration is necessary if they stand any chance for success. However, the second part of the process is equally important; the voters must also be persuaded that the challenger is the candidate most likely to produce more desirable conditions or policies. Therefore, the complexity of the style is increased because not only must those who challenge call for change, but also they must simultaneously demonstrate their own capability in bringing about that change. As if all of this were not difficult enough, it is entirely possible that the success of the challenger may ultimately depend on the skill of the incumbent—whether or not the incumbent makes a major mistake in campaign strategy or becomes a victim of prevailing conditions. Thus, it is no understatement to maintain that the task facing most challengers is formidable.

In spite of the potential hazards or burdens, advocating change—the challenger campaign style—is not new. As a matter of fact, it probably got its start in the presidential campaign of 1800 when Jeffersonians distributed leaflets that asked, "Is it not time for a change?" Whenever it began, it has been used by many candidates who have sought elective office. Moreover, elements of the style have even been employed by incumbents such as Harry Truman and Gerald Ford, who felt it would be more beneficial to their candidacies to call for a change in Congress rather than only try to explain the present problems.

The strategies examined in this section include the following:

- Attacking the record of opponents
- Taking the offensive position on issues
- Calling for a change
- Emphasizing optimism for the future
- Speaking to traditional values rather than calling for value changes
- Appearing to represent the philosophical center of the political party
- Delegating personal or harsh attacks in an effort to control demagogic rhetoric

### *Attacking the Record*

Just as running on the record of their accomplishments is a central strategy of incumbency, so, too, is attacking that same record a prime characteristic of the challenger style. As a matter of fact, the ability to criticize freely (and often in exaggerated terms) may well be one of the most important benefits the challenger possesses.<sup>71</sup>

When there is no incumbent, candidates attack the record of the current administration (if they do not represent the same political party) or even an opponent's record in a previous position. Whatever becomes the focus of criticism, the object is to attack—to create doubt in voters' minds regarding the incumbent's/opponent's ability—to stimulate public awareness of any problems that exist or to foster a sense of dissatisfaction and even unhappiness with the state of affairs generally.

In 1996, Senator Dole attacked President Clinton on a number of issues and tried to convince voters that problems existed that demanded attention. For example, Dole attacked Clinton's campaign for accepting large financial contributions from foreign business interests.<sup>72</sup> He also demanded that President Clinton forgo future pardons connected with Whitewater, the failed land deal in which Clinton had been accused of wrongdoing.<sup>73</sup> The problem for Dole was twofold. First, the president's campaign responded immediately by counterattacking; and second, voters appeared to have little interest in his attacks on the president. In the 2000 campaign, Vice President Gore (who, in his role as the sitting vice president, could have run as an incumbent but chose to attack as though he were the challenger) called Governor Bush's proposals a "risky scheme."<sup>74</sup> Not to be "outdone" by the attacks of his rival, Bush during his nominating acceptance address attacked the vice president by joking that if Gore had been around when Edison was testing the lightbulb he would have called it a "risky anti-candle scheme."<sup>75</sup> Even before the primaries had begun, the vice president initiated an onslaught against former senator Bill Bradley, who turned out to be his only real competitor for the nomination of the Democratic Party. At a Jefferson-Jackson Day political dinner in Iowa in early October, Gore charged that Bradley

was a quitter for leaving the Senate during the tough times in the mid-1990s, called Bradley's health care plan "risky" because it would replace Medicaid with "vouchers," and claimed (inaccurately) that Bradley had voted against flood relief for farmers.<sup>76</sup>

Interestingly, attack is so much a part of challenger style that it frequently occurs even when the predominant public perception of the incumbent is that a credible job has been done. In this instance, the challenger may minimize the importance of the accomplishments, credit them to someone or something else (often another branch or level of government that happens to be controlled by their own party), never mention the accomplishments, or point out that in the years ahead accomplishments will be viewed as problems. Few challengers, however, have been as mean-spirited in their attacks on the incumbent as was Geoffrey Feiger during the 1998 Michigan primary when in his nonstop attack on the Republican incumbent, Governor John Engler, he called him "a cheater, a liar, and a coward . . . a man of mediocre intelligence who's never done anything in life but suck off the public trough."<sup>77</sup>

By whatever means various challengers go about it, their ability to attack existing records or policies is a crucial tool and integral to the overall style.

### *Taking the Offensive Position on Issues*

Essentially, this strategy involves nothing more than taking the offensive position on issues important to the campaign—probing, questioning, challenging, attacking, but never presenting concrete solutions for problems. It is the incumbent who has to defend unworkable solutions to insolvable problems; the challenger can limit rhetoric to developing problems, keeping the incumbent in a position where all actions have to be defended.<sup>78</sup> In a sense, it is part of a challenger's expected role—to criticize, attack, point out needs—generally guiding voters to begin thinking that the incumbent has been ineffective. Challengers are not expected to solve problems (they have had no chance as officeholders to do so). This is, of course, a major advantage (one of the relatively few), and those who abandon it often lose the election. As a matter of fact, the more detailed that challengers become in offering solutions, the more material they provide to be attacked themselves. In other words, when they drop the offensive, they have essentially traded places with incumbents, thus compounding their difficulties because unlike incumbents, they lack the tools to solve problems. Thus, the strategy is simply to talk about what is wrong without suggesting any precise ways in which conditions can be righted.

History is replete with examples of successful challengers who used this strategy and won. In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt never divulged the contents of his "New Deal"; in 1952, Dwight Eisenhower never suggested how he

would deal with the Korean conflict except to promise that he would personally go there and look it over; in 1960, John Kennedy never shared the details of the "New Frontier"; in 1968, Richard Nixon only said he had a plan regarding the war in Vietnam but never provided any clues regarding it; in 1976, Jimmy Carter seldom offered solutions more substantive than his love and admiration for the people; in 1980, Ronald Reagan never explained just how his supply-side economics would do all he claimed for health care reform, and welfare reform without providing clear details of the solutions he advocated. Clinton charged Bush with a failed economic policy and said the president had offered no plan to improve conditions. "Unlike our competitors, America has no natural economic strategy," he told employees in a manufacturing plant in Oregon. "Instead we have a series of unconnected, piecemeal efforts, and trickle-down economics. Under trickle-down economics, our manufacturing strength has trickled away."<sup>79</sup> At another time he said, "if you look at the last 12 years, we now have a chance to assess whether the theory has worked. In 1980, we had the highest wages in the world. Now we are 13th and dropping."<sup>80</sup> And in 2000, George W. Bush never really explained how taxes could be cut while simultaneously maintaining the surplus in the federal government. In retrospect, it is unlikely that most of these challengers even knew how they might solve all of the problems they discussed once they were elected. Whether they did or did not, solutions were not offered, and the candidates managed to keep their offensive position on the issues while forcing their opponents to defend, justify, and offer plans.

Conversely, in 1964 and again in 1972, two challengers never seemed to understand the essential nature of the strategy. Barry Goldwater and George McGovern thought they had to present specific proposals on topics as varied as welfare and the way to fight wars. As the details of their plans became known, they were subjected to intensive analysis, debated, refuted by opponents and media, and finally rejected as absurd. Goldwater and McGovern not only lost their credibility as serious presidential candidates but lost an important advantage. Taking and keeping the right to attack without proposing solutions is a major challenger strategy that only the foolish abandon.

#### *Calling for a Change*

From the beginning of each campaign season, it becomes clear that many candidates announce that they are "willing" to run for office because they believe that a change is necessary. Whether it involves specific programs and policies, philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of government or

even modification in administrative style, calling for a change has become the dominant characteristic of those who challenge.

This strategy has been employed in various ways. For example, John Kennedy talked about the need to "get the country moving again"—a stylistic and substantive change from a passive attitude to aggressive, take-charge action. Jimmy Carter used a moralistic change—a return to honest, decent, and compassionate government. Ronald Reagan argued for economic as well as philosophical change, while Edward Kennedy gave, as his only reason for an intraparty challenge, the need for a change in the manner and style of presidential leadership. Perhaps one of the most specific uses of the strategy was exemplified by Senator John Glenn, who in the early months of the surfacing stage of the 1984 presidential campaign called for a change of direction in budgeting for basic research and technological development as well as a dramatic overhaul of the Social Security system. Conversely, the failure of Michael Dukakis to call for a change in 1988 was one of the reasons for his defeat. According to John Sasso, the chief strategist for Dukakis's presidential campaign, "the failure to establish a clear campaign theme and a compelling case for political change" was a mistake on their part.<sup>81</sup> In 1992, Clinton integrated talk of reform into his overall call for change. In June-1992, he told an audience, "When I got into this race, the President was at an historic high point in popularity. But I was convinced then and I am convinced now that this country needs profound change."<sup>82</sup> In 1996, Bob Dole asserted that the nation needed material, or economic, as well as moral change. And in 2000, the Republican nominee George W. Bush and Dick Cheney asserted that the American military had been allowed to decline because funding to the Department of Defense had not increased significantly during the Clinton years.

Thus, regardless of how it is employed, the essence of challenger style must revolve around seeking change. If a change from existing conditions, incumbents, or administrations is unnecessary, then so, too, are challengers.

#### *Emphasizing Optimism for the Future*

While most candidates, regardless of the level of office sought, traditionally spend some time during the campaign talking about their vision or their optimism for the future, the strategy is particularly important for those who would challenge the status quo. After all, if existing conditions are so bad, can they ever be better? Thus, the task of the challenger is not only to attack but to hold out the promise of a better tomorrow—a day when wrongs will be righted, when justice will prevail, and when health, wealth, and happiness will be more than just vague illusions. In other words, challengers must assume a "rhetoric of optimism" as opposed to a "rhetoric of despair."<sup>83</sup>

This is not to suggest that candidates who employ the strategy dismiss the

nation's needs from their discourse; rather, it is a question of emphasis. For example, in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt obviously acknowledged the problems caused by the economic depression, but the central focus of his campaign was hope for the future. John Kennedy talked about problems, but his emphasis was on the country's potential to get moving again; Ronald Reagan pledged that he would lead a crusade to make the United States great again; the commitment of George H. W. Bush to the spirit of volunteerism as a substitute for federal government programs was embodied in the phrases first used in his nomination acceptance speech "kinder, gentler nation" and "a thousand points of light;" and the focus of Bill Clinton's rhetoric was the creation of a government that efficiently works for people, for a change. In short, a part of the challenger style is reliance on the positive—emphasizing hope and faith in the future, an optimism that the nation's tomorrow will, in fact, be better than today.

Speaking to traditional values, even though the overall challenger style is dominated by a call for redirection or change, does not mean a redefinition of values. In fact, it is just the opposite. Successful challengers must reinforce majority values instead of attempting to forge new ones. In other words, they must have some understanding of the way in which people view themselves and their society—some understanding of the current tenets of the American Dream. In 1992, Bill Clinton

used the challenger strategy of speaking to traditional values as both a defensive and as an offensive weapon. For example, he defended against direct attacks from Bush by saying, "I think the implication he has made that somehow Democrats are godless is deeply offensive to me . . . and to a lot of us who cherish our religious convictions and also respect America's tradition of religious diversity."<sup>84</sup>

While this strategy has been understood by challengers such as Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George H. W. Bush, it may be more interesting to explain it by the example of one who did not. In 1972, before suffering the worst defeat in the history of presidential politics, Democratic challenger George McGovern seemed to have little comprehension of what most citizens wanted. He talked about massive or radical changes in welfare and tax reform, military spending and inflation, school busing, amnesty for those who had left the country rather than participate in the Vietnam War, and the need for more civil rights legislation. What McGovern failed to understand was that most citizens "were tired of social reforms, tired of the 'good-cause' people; that the majority preferred to live their own lives privately, unplagued by moralities, or war, or riots, or violence."<sup>85</sup> Middle-class citizens viewed McGovern as a candidate of an elitist upper class whose values they did not understand except to know that they

angered and frightened them. Through his failure to speak to the dreams or visions of the electorate, McGovern abandoned an important strategy of the challenger style.

#### *Appearing to Represent the Philosophical Center*

Throughout our political history, successful challengers have been ideological representatives from the mainstream of the major parties, or they have tried to appear as though they were. While some may have been, on one or two issues, a bit to the right or left of the majority of the party, they have not been representatives of the outer or fringe groups. In most campaigns, the fringe groups eventually have compromised and supported their party's candidate, even though that candidate may have been more conservative or liberal than they would have preferred. In the presidential campaign of 1980 and even in 1984, Ronald Reagan, who had long been the champion of the ultraconservatives within the GOP, attempted to position himself closer to the ideological Republican middle once he had secured the nomination. In 1988, George H. W. Bush used the same strategy by repositioning himself on such issues as abortion. In 1996, Bill Clinton modified his stand on so many domestic issues, it was difficult, and frequently impossible, for his opponent to claim even traditional Republican positions. And in 2000, George W. Bush steadily moved to the philosophical center after his victories in the Super Tuesday primaries all but finalized his selection as the Republican nominee.

The only two major exceptions in contemporary presidential politics have been Barry Goldwater and George McGovern, each of whom, as the candidate of fringe groups, did not try to reposition himself in the center of his respective party. Instead, each attempted to reform the ideological majority around the ideological minority. In so doing, they failed to employ a traditional challenger strategy.

While Goldwater and McGovern did not attempt to occupy a more central ideological ground, two nominees during the 1980s were blocked from using the strategy by their opponents. In 1984, Ronald Reagan was able to position Walter Mondale as a candidate of the Democratic fringe because of the former vice president's stand on increased taxes, social welfare issues, and defense spending and because of the endorsement of him by groups such as the National Organization of Women and the Gay Liberation Movement. Similarly, in 1988, George H. W. Bush, who for much of his political career had been perceived by conservative Republicans as too liberal, repositioned himself in the center and branded Michael Dukakis as a liberal even among Democrats. A liberal, according to the Bush definition, was someone who, like Governor Dukakis, was opposed to children saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school, was so soft on crime he let convicted

murderers out of prison on weekend furloughs, and who did not support defense initiatives such as the MX missile—in other words, someone who was outside the mainstream of traditional American values. The label proved disastrous for Dukakis because the governor failed to reposition himself or to redefine the vice president's interpretation of a liberal.

In 1992, Bill Clinton did not allow himself to be defined by his opponents. From the surfacing period onward, he positioned himself as a "new kind of Democrat." As a matter of fact, he was one of the founding members of the Democratic Leadership Council—a group of Democrats recognized for its conservative to moderate position on many issues. However, in 1996, Republican challenger Bob Dole had a singular inability to define himself. In fact, it was his very lack of definition that allowed the incumbent and his fellow Democrats to maintain the hold on the ideological center and force Dole to the conservative right, a position that he did not always fit.

#### *Delegating Personal or Harsh Attacks*

Although attack remains a central imperative of the challenger style, successful candidates (particularly in statewide or national races) do not themselves indulge in demagogic rhetoric. While smear tactics and political hatchet work have been a part of elective politics for years, wise challengers have left harsh or vitriolic language to running mates, surrogate speakers, or their television advertising and printed materials. The reason for delegating this kind of attack is, at least in part, related to the symbolic nature of the campaign itself. As we have mentioned earlier, campaigns are a symbolic representation of what or how candidates might behave if elected—a kind of vignette from which voters are able to transfer campaign performance into performance as officeholders. Thus, the challenger who likens the incumbent to Adolf Hitler, asserts that the president behaves like a reformed drunk, or argues that the incumbent is ignorant of foreign policy—as did George McGovern in 1972, Edward Kennedy in 1980, and Walter Mondale in 1984—is unwise.

Demagogy is never viewed as an asset and normally backfires for the challenger who employs it. In 1988, Michael Dukakis was attacked as being soft on defense, soft on crime, and soft on patriotism. However, George Bush was smart enough to leave direct attacks on his opponent to others and to his television advertising campaign. In 1992, Clinton attacked the policies of the president and his administration but was careful to show no disrespect to President Bush, even after the president referred to Clinton as a "bozo." However, in 1996, Bob Dole attacked President Clinton's personal character. Not only were Dole's attacks ineffective, as the president retained his double-digit lead in the polls, but the strategy actually persuaded some voters to oppose Dole and support Clinton, because they thought personal

attacks were "in bad taste and removed from the issues of being the president."<sup>86</sup> In 2000, George W. Bush, while never actually mentioning the Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal or the subsequent impeachment of the president, nonetheless made Dole's argument more tactfully by focusing on how he would uphold the dignity of the presidency and his own family values.

#### *Summary*

These, then, are the strategies that comprise the challenger style. While there are fewer of them than there are incumbency strategies, they can also be powerful when used correctly. However, those who employ them, just as those who employ their counterparts, must understand the importance of image creation and maintenance. For example, it does little good if a candidate attacks the record of the incumbent but does so using demagogic language or leaves no outlet for the promise of a better tomorrow. In a similar manner, those who fail to understand the necessity of appearing to represent the values of the majority of the electorate as they call for a change in the course or direction of present policies will have little success. In short, challenger campaigning is difficult primarily because being a challenger is not nearly as advantageous as being an incumbent. Challengers win but not as often. Challengers have some advantages over incumbents but not very many. In the final analysis, challengers may be only as successful as incumbents are incompetent to employ the symbolic and pragmatic strategies their office provides.

#### *Incumbent/Challenger: A Merger of Styles*

As discussed earlier, the incumbent and challenger strategies are not absolute categories. Those candidates who are incumbents are not restricted to a specific set of incumbency strategies any more than challengers are confined to a particular set of challenger strategies. While the rhetoric of most candidates typically reflects their actual position in the race, there are instances wherein aspects of incumbency and challenger styles have been combined. It is not uncommon, for example, for challengers to assume the mantle of incumbency whenever and wherever possible; its advantages are well documented. Those who challenge must try to emphasize whatever accomplishments they have had in public life, appear to be acquainted with other leaders, and have a clear need to use whatever means available to them to gain the attention of the media. Similarly, events may, from time to time, compel incumbents to borrow strategies more frequently associated with the challenger. While we consider it unlikely that any incumbent would ever find it advantageous to drop completely the symbolic strategies or to

call for a change, an incumbent may well emphasize ideological centrality or rely on surrogate speakers for overt/direct personal attacks on opponents. Such rhetorical borrowing between categories, perhaps in response to changing conditions, is only part of what we mean by the incumbent/challenger style.

The most prominent characteristics of the combined style are abandonment of the essential purpose or thrust of incumbent or challenger rhetoric and abandonment of the responsibilities each has. If the challenger does not attack or at least question the policies and actions of the incumbent, no real campaign dialogue occurs. In a similar vein, if the incumbent will not acknowledge problems, defend current policies or programs, or even suggest/offer a future course of action, no real dialogue can occur. Although there is little question that from time to time incumbent presidents or vice presidents running for reelection have used strategies of incumbency as well as those of a challenger, perhaps the best way to understand the incumbent/challenger style is through two extended examples, one from 1984 and one from 2000. In 1984, we had two challengers, one of whom was president of the United States. Beginning with his nomination acceptance speech, Ronald Reagan's rhetoric was heavily centered around two staples of the challenger style: attacking the policies of the opposition (in this case going back to the Carter-Mondale administration) while taking the offensive position on issues, and emphasizing optimism for the future. Incumbency strategies were only to enhance his campaign as a challenger. While Reagan was not the first sitting president to try to campaign for reelection in this manner, he was the first one since Harry Truman to do so successfully.

Part of Reagan's success as an "incumbent challenger" was his ability figuratively to step out of office at crucial moments and reflect on problems—"posing as a commentator who happened to live on Pennsylvania Avenue"—never admitting that he, as the result of election, was currently more responsible than any other single individual for the federal government.<sup>87</sup> But there was another part to the strategy: painting the portrait of a future at once so uplifting and patriotic that all problems of the moment were dwarfed by it.

Americans are by nature optimists. We believe in people—especially heroes—and in happy endings. Successful candidates have long known that optimism is the way to the hearts of the American electorate. "At the worst of times, Franklin Roosevelt uplifted with a smile, while years later, Jimmy Carter guaranteed his defeat by telling us that we were suffering from malaise."<sup>88</sup> What was so effective about Reagan's use of cheer was his own appearance of amiability, an understanding of the political fact that Americans want to hear good news, as well as the way he managed to distance himself from responsibility when things went wrong. "It was as if he was a king who reigned but did not rule—a constitutional monarch whose per-

formance was a symbol to his people while politicians did the dirty work of governing."<sup>89</sup> In 1984, he campaigned for reelection as a critic of federal budget deficits even while he had created the largest deficit in history.

In short, Reagan offered voters, just as he had in 1980 when he had actually been a challenger, a picture of a future that did not include hard choices or sacrifices he might ask them to make after the election. However, a strategy of optimism is possible only if a candidate has managed to avoid the defensive position on issues. This was the second overt use of the challenger style employed by the incumbent president.

Throughout the campaign, it was as if there were two challengers—both attacking, probing, questioning, but the incumbent/challenger never defending his policies. In fact, by seizing the offensive on issues, the president reduced his opponent to the most disadvantageous challenger posture, suggesting solutions for problems. Reagan did not have to make allowances for solving problems because he did not acknowledge the existence of problems. Unwilling to accept the issues presented by Mondale as problems, let alone acknowledging any responsibility for them, the president simply smiled and said that the trend is the thing and every day in every way, things are getting better. When Mondale charged that the nuclear arms race had heated up between Washington and Moscow and that U.S.-Soviet relations were strained, the president responded by ignoring the issue and talked about America standing tall and looking to the 1980s with courage, confidence, and hope. Finally, in an absolute measure of desperation, Mondale outlined solutions—such as the inevitable raising of taxes to deal with the national deficit. When time after time Mondale tried to push Reagan on exactly what he was going to do about the deficit, the president only responded that it was a little scary to have a deficit of a \$180 billion and that even if he had "inherited the wreckage from the Democrats," he was willing to work with them to repair the problem.

From the beginning, it appeared that the challenger and the incumbent had reversed roles. The incumbent ran against "big spending demons in Washington" and "puzzle-palaces on the Potomac," and whenever he left the White House, he talked about what a pleasure it was to be out of Washington. The challenger sought to tie the incumbent to problems the country faced, and when there was no response, he created his own solutions. The Reagan staff had reasoned that it was unnecessary to speak to the specific issues raised by Mondale. They had determined before the campaign even began that the reelection effort would be concentrated on the president's leadership and the problems resulting from the Carter-Mondale past, without defending current programs or without proposing any new or specific programs for the future.<sup>90</sup> They believed their strategy would be successful because Reagan had been on the political stage for thirty years. His views were well known by the American people. As the press secretary for his re-

election campaign, James Lake, said, "It would be foolish of us to let Ronald Reagan respond to Mr. Mondale . . . people don't care. They get his message. They see him on television and read the newspaper."<sup>91</sup> Thus, the incumbent outlined scenes and evoked symbols, leaving details—particularly unpleasant details—for later. Patriotic slogans, such as "America is back," "America stands tall," "America is too great for small dreams," or "the opportunity society," combined with the persona of the incumbent himself and his stage-managed appearances drove the 1984 presidential campaign into what one political commentator called a "collage of manufactured happiness as in an infinitely extended television commercial."<sup>92</sup>

In a similar manner, during the presidential campaign of 2000, Vice President Al Gore chose to ignore many of the incumbent's rhetorical strategies (which as the sitting vice president were "rightfully" his) and adopt, instead, the rhetorical posture of a challenger. From the beginning (when announcing his candidacy, in debating his only Democratic rival, Bill Bradley, during the primaries, in his nomination acceptance speech, and right through the general election), the vice president made it clear that he was "his own man." Given, however, that the country was at peace and experiencing sustained economic prosperity, it would have been reasonable (and rhetorically advantageous) for Gore to have used incumbency strategies—especially during the general election campaign when his opponent had no experience in many areas typically deemed important for presidents. It is not that the vice president seldom postured himself as an incumbent; it is that he eschewed some of those strategies that could have been important to his candidacy. For example, he failed to discuss any foreign policy experience he had had as vice president, including meeting or consulting with foreign leaders, being a member of the administration's National Security Team, or even being part of the administration who had achieved some progress with the Middle East peace process. In addition to not assuming the rhetorical posture of an incumbent in foreign policy issues, the vice president failed to maximize the administration's accomplishments in domestic policy issues important to the electorate. He sounded like the challenger, not the incumbent, for example, when he talked about reduced crime, welfare reform, or the turn from a national deficit to a national surplus. Instead of taking his share of the credit, he argued that "things were not good enough," "we need to do more and better," or "you ain't seen nothing yet." The point we make is simply this: By assuming an incumbent/challenger style, Vice President Gore threw out the rhetorical advantages of incumbency that may ultimately have cost him votes in a historically close election. While in 1984 President Reagan was successful in combining incumbent and challenger strategies, Vice President Gore was not. Clearly it remains a "tricky" rhetorical strategy for which there is no guarantee for success.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined an important yet frequently overlooked element of elective politics—campaign style. In so doing, we considered style as sets of communication strategies that are employed by all candidates and noted the relationship of image and advancements in transportation and communication to their creation and maintenance.

The incumbency style was defined as a blend of symbolic and pragmatic communication strategies designed to make candidates be perceived by voters as not only good enough for the office sought but appear as if they already possess the office. Fifteen different yet complementary strategies were examined. In a similar manner, we analyzed the challenger style, defining it as a series of communication strategies designed to persuade voters that change is needed and that the candidate is the best person to bring about change. Seven different yet complementary strategies were discussed. Finally, we considered the incumbent/challenger style and noted that the combination of strategies that comprise it, at least as illustrated during the 1984 and 2000 presidential campaigns, can play a major role in the creation of empty political rhetoric.

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