
ONE

The Problem of Beginnings in New Hampshire

Control over the Play

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The New Hampshire primary: "It's the closest thing we've got to political amniocentesis."

—Dayton Duncan, Booknotes interview,
C-SPAN, March 31, 1991

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

That the New Hampshire primary is a key event in American political campaigns has been well established. It is the first primary in the nation, as mandated by the New Hampshire legislature.¹ This chapter takes an interpretive perspective, based on direct observation of the candidates and media during the primary and on an analysis of the primary's messages. This single primary constructs a critical part of the quadrennial electoral drama, defining the characteristics of the protagonists. The candidates have an unusually broad array of communication strategies available to them in this state. The focus of this chapter is on the initial electoral struggle of the candidates and media to exert control over the discourse of the 1992 New Hampshire presidential primary, and through it, the campaign to follow.

New Hampshire's voter turnout is regularly among the highest in the nation for a primary: 67 percent of registered voters voted in 1992, when the average turnout in primaries was just over 30 percent of registered voters (Baker, 1993). Not only is voter interest and participation high, but "tidal shifts in preference have not been uncommon in the final days before primaries there" (John, 1989, p. 592), placing great pressure on the candidates to respond quickly to change and on the media to make sense of a volatile situation.

From 1952 through 1988 no candidate ever won the presidency without winning there. (Bill Clinton broke this pattern in 1992, coming in second in New Hampshire.) News coverage of this primary is often the heaviest of all the states (Adams, 1987; Lichter, Amundsen, and Noyes, 1988; Kerbel, 1994). Research on the 1992 primaries has established that voters in other states formed candidate perceptions based on network news coverage of the New Hampshire primary, extending its influence far beyond the Northeast (Pfau et al., 1993). And the winner in New Hampshire has regularly made significant gains in the opinion polls (Mayer 1987).

Much prior research has been done on this subject. We know that the candidates go through a frenzy of presidential surfacing in New Hampshire, introducing themselves and attempting to emerge as serious contenders for the nomination of a major party, their final chance before the first primary votes are cast (Trent, 1978; Kendall and Trent, 1989). In an age of television and computers, this frenzy is only heightened. As Meyrowitz says, "action and reaction collapse into a co-constructed reality once possible only in face-to-face communication," with groups reacting "to each other's reactions to each other—in real time" (1992, p. 470). Voters at this early stage are just beginning to focus on the campaign; they tend to be so uninformed and uncertain about who the candidates are and which one they prefer that the candidates have an unparalleled opportunity to influence their knowledge and feelings (Patterson, 1980; Kennamer and Chaffee, 1982; Popkin, 1991).

We know that the majority of media coverage of the primary deals with the horse race, the question of who is winning (Patterson, 1980, 1993; Robinson and Sheehan, 1983), and with the candidates' viability, or "the relative chances of candidates winning the nomination." These questions about winning include the media's "fascination with [the] momentum" of the candidates (Brady and Johnston, 1987, p. 132). Matthews (1978) has established that the early primaries have a winnowing effect, as candidates who have done poorly withdraw from the race because they no longer seem to be viable.

Finally, we know that the voters and media are looking at the candidates' character, for signs that they have the presidential leadership traits to solve the nation's problems (Brady and Johnston, 1987; Bartels, 1988). This focus explains the heavy attention given to such presumed revelations of inner character as Senator Edmund Muskie's crying while defending his wife from an editorial attack in the 1972 New Hampshire primary. Candidates work to convey image traits effectively through their messages, both interpersonally and through the media. But the task is complex and difficult, because images are not only multifaceted and to some extent affected by the particular campaign context, but also co-constructed among the candidates, the media, and the voters. According to Loudon (1990), image is "an evaluation negotiated

and constructed by candidates and voters in a cooperative venture" (p. 1). Certainly that is true, but the media also play a role in this construction.

Voters have an ideal image of a candidate in their minds, and some of the traits in that profile have reappeared across campaigns: honesty, competence (including experience), empathy, and strength and decisiveness (Nimmo and Savage, 1976; Hellweg and King, 1983; Hellweg, King, and Williams, 1988; Trent et al., 1993). In a study of New Hampshire citizens attending candidate events during the 1992 primary, respondents said the most important candidate characteristics (4 or above on a 5-point scale) were (in this order): honesty, talks about the nation's problems (tied), has solutions to problems, good moral character, calm and cautious, energetic and aggressive leader, forceful public speaker, and experience in office (Trent et al., 1993).

These research findings have been valuable in aiding our understanding of the nature and significance of communication in the early primaries. However, the overall picture may be lost sight of when we focus on these pieces of the whole. The metaphor of the dramatic ritual advocated by Nimmo and Combs (1990) allows us to examine the whole event. They define ritual as "a series of acts that, for the most part, people regularly and faithfully perform time and time again"; a dramatic ritual exists "when the elements of a drama repeatedly relate to one another in a ritualistic fashion" (p. 54). Rituals are much more powerful than ceremonies, because they transform, appealing to the emotions; they "tap, reflect, and intensify deeply held values, ideals, and desires" (p. 69).

The presidential election is such a structured, rule-governed ritual, they argue, consisting of "dramatic confrontations, each side fantasizing an ideal America either lost but to be regained, or one yet to be found." In this ritual, the incumbent generally defends the *status quo*, arguing that his administration has brought gains and there will be more to come. The challenger attacks the *status quo* and argues for changes to bring about a brighter future, presenting himself as the one most capable of effecting these changes. The campaign renews the belief "that the story will have a happy ending (that is, that the contest can be won and greatness can be found or regained)" (pp. 54–55). The dramatic ritual of the campaign places a premium on hope: if it makes a difference who is going to be president, and if the choice is important to voters—a concept underlined by the campaign ritual—then the candidates "must enunciate a rhetorical vision of hope" (p. 68). Examples of such visions have been John F. Kennedy's promise to "get America moving again" and Jimmy Carter's theme of restoring trust and providing a "government as good as its people."

This metaphor of the dramatic ritual seemed particularly appropriate for examining the New Hampshire primary, after my immersion in that primary

in 1988 and 1992. My perspective both years was that of a participant observer, a communication professor with media credentials,² traveling with the journalists and observing them and the candidates every day. All appeared to be engaged in a quest and a struggle: a quest to find out what the campaign (or play) was going to be about, and a struggle to shape the way the play was written. The concern with surfacing and the horse race and viability and winnowing and character were all there. but the main goal was to grasp and shape the presidential campaign story.

Nimmo and Combs say that "each phase of the presidential election coverage . . . is a minidrama" (p. 55), and identify the primary and caucus phase as one of those minidramas. In this view, New Hampshire would be a small part of the overall minidrama of thirty-eight primaries and thirteen caucuses in 1992. But the view from within the New Hampshire primary seemed bigger than that. At this early point in the campaign, when public opinion was so unformed (Patterson, 1980; Kennamer and Chaffee, 1982; Popkin, 1991), there was an obvious opportunity for a substantial part of the election drama to be constructed. The New Hampshire primary received almost undivided attention from the media and candidates during the February 11–19 period. Never again would there be such a concentrated focus; after New Hampshire, as Renee Loth of the *Boston Globe* wrote (Feb. 19, 1992, p. 1), the presidential campaign would split "like a band of refracted light, flashing attention on the 27 states that will hold primaries or caucuses in the next 30 days." The media focused heavily on the matter of electability, on who could win, not just in New Hampshire, but also in the fall election. In effect, they were trying to foresee the end of the play.

With these impressions of the large scope and influence of New Hampshire in mind, I examined the efforts of the candidates and media to shape answers to the following questions, which are inherent in the electoral drama, and the evidence of their success:

1. Who were the protagonists, and who were the minor characters in the play? Indicators of such position included endorsements, pictures, press attention, claims of important accomplishments, poll standings, crowd size, and titles.
2. What was the content of the character of the protagonists? Who had the traits of honesty, competence, compassion, and strength most closely approximating the ideal image of a presidential candidate? Character was conveyed through word choice, pictures, and the selection of representative anecdotes supposedly revealing of character.
3. What visions did the protagonists project, and who best projected the vision of hope? Language and pictures were instrumental in creating these visions.

For the candidates, it was vital that the construction of answers to these questions would please the voters, first in New Hampshire, and because New Hampshire influenced national perceptions, voters in the rest of the nation (Pfau et al., 1993). The media, as interpreters of the action to the public, also had to make decisions about these questions. The candidates struggled among themselves to make their answers prevail, and they also struggled with the media. All were well aware of the record of this primary in selecting a winner and dooming most of the candidates to life as a historical footnote. (Note: Other scholars are doing important work focusing upon voter involvement in this process during the primaries. See Kern and Just, 1994; Kern and Just, forthcoming, 1995; West, Kern, and Alger, 1992; Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992).

New Hampshire is a small state (in 1992 its population was only 1,110,801; *World Almanac*, 1994). The main way voters learn about the candidates is through mass communication—the candidates' television ads, and newspapers and television news—and the primary emphasis of this study is on those media. But "retail politics" remain vitally important in New Hampshire. Because the bulk of the population is clustered in the southern part of the state, the candidates can easily travel around and be seen by thousands of voters personally. They can meet with influential people who, with a phone call, can secure a vote. The state also has a long history of intense interest in primaries and high voter turnout. Thus, the chapter discusses three other avenues through which the candidates reached smaller numbers of the voters and the press: their campaign literature, their published daily schedules, and their speeches.

This chapter focuses on the two front-runners in each party in February 1992: Republicans George Bush and Pat Buchanan, and Democrats Paul Tsongas and Bill Clinton. The information is part of a larger study that will include Democrats Tom Harkin, Bob Kerrey, and Jerry Brown as well.

METHODS

In examining the candidates' input into the script, I reviewed the following: one major campaign leaflet from each candidate, secured at the campaign headquarters, as well as Tsongas's larger booklet; the first three or four of their television ads shown in New Hampshire; the video distributed door to door by the Clinton campaign; the candidate schedules distributed by the campaigns; and sample speeches I observed. I based my analysis of the campaign leaflets on the pictures, the language that appeared in bold or large type, and the captions. Important analysis of the New Hampshire television advertisements has been done by L. Patrick Devlin (1994), and I relied on that and added analysis of Clinton's video distributed to undecided voters. I

read the candidates' schedules to see which groups they spoke to, and counted each person's public campaign appearances.

The discussion of speeches and speech events is based on those I saw myself, including six by Clinton, two each by Tsongas and Buchanan, and one by Bush; a debate involving all five leading Democrats; a Democratic dinner at which three of the Democrats spoke; and a Buchanan whistle-stop tour.

In describing the media's efforts to construct the script, I examined all front-page stories and pictures about the primary in the newspapers (150 stories and 58 pictures), and 25 television news broadcasts in the February 11–19, 1992 period (the primary was on Feb. 18). The national print sources examined were the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Regional sources were the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Herald*. Local sources were the *Manchester Union Leader*, *Concord Monitor* (Feb. 13, 14, 15, and 17 only), and *Nashua Telegraph*. These papers were selected because they were available in the Manchester-Concord-Nashua area where the majority of New Hampshire live, and where the candidates and journalists clustered. The television broadcasts viewed were from NBC, CBS, and ABC nightly news, complete except for NBC, February 15 and 16. A more exhaustive study would have included coverage by CNN, WMUR (the New Hampshire television station), and several Boston stations.

The units of analysis for television were stories on the New Hampshire campaign. The coding scheme drew on Graber (1987), recording the date, network, anchor and reporter names, and topics covered, and then examined the way the story answered the three research questions. For each story the researcher asked: (1) which candidates were mentioned (to distinguish major and minor characters in the play); (2) what candidate characteristics were described or shown; and (3) what attention, if any, was given to the candidates' visions of the future.

The units of analysis for newspapers were the front-page stories and pictures on the primaries. These first-presented messages were selected because of their attention-getting position, because newspaper readers whether interested in politics or not generally scan the first page, and because this choice brought the volume of material down to a manageable size. The coding scheme followed for the newspaper stories was similar to that used for the televised news stories.

THE CANDIDATES' ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT THE PLAY

Campaign Literature

The candidates have complete control over the message in their literature, and therefore an examination of the contents was useful to discover how they

chose to present themselves. It is not surprising that all the candidates used their literature to claim that they were major characters in the play. They were the stars of their leaflets pictorially: their faces always appeared on the cover, except for that of Tsongas, who appeared waving and smiling once the leaflet was opened. Bush emphasized his importance through the use of title—he was “President George Bush”—while the others chose a less hierarchical and more folksy approach, calling themselves Bill Clinton, Paul Tsongas, and Pat Buchanan.

Three of the four protagonists used their past records to support a claim to a major role, summarizing positions held, legislation initiated, proposals made. The exception to this pattern was Buchanan, whose leaflet made no claims to a past record of accomplishment; instead, it devoted the entire space to attacking the *status quo* and proposing a ten-point plan for change.

Two other strategies candidates used in their literature to convey an impression of viability and legitimacy were endorsements and accounts of how they had won against the odds before.

There was a sameness in the way the Democratic candidates constructed their images in the literature. The ideal image of the president, based on the Democrats’ literature, was of a “fighter.” Both used that word on the pamphlet cover: Clinton was “Fighting for the Forgotten Middle Class,” and Tsongas told “How to fight for America’s economic future and win.”

The two Republicans displayed little common ground in their efforts to flesh out their images. The Buchanan character, according to his leaflet, was first of all patriotic: he favored “Putting and Keeping America First.” The whole leaflet developed this theme, presenting ten steps for achieving these goals. Bush, in contrast, stressed his competence and decisiveness on the topic New Hampshire was most concerned about: the economy. His pamphlet was “A Plan” for an “Economic Growth Agenda,” and the pictures showed him in action, presumably promoting his plan.

A third question about the literature concerns the efforts of each candidate to project a vision of what he would do as president, a fantasy of “an ideal America either lost but to be regained, or one yet to be found” (Nimmo and Combs, 1990, pp. 54–55).

Clinton’s pamphlet had a clear, dominant vision, called “Bill Clinton’s Plan” to “Put America Back to Work.” He offered an economic plan, a health care plan, and a plan to improve education; in each plan he envisioned the positive effects of his proposal. Positive, smiling pictures and language reinforced the vision.

The most original and ambitious print document in the 1992 New Hampshire primary was Tsongas’s eighty-five-page booklet, “A Call to Economic Arms.” He distributed it widely by mail and in person, autographing and giving away dozens of copies at every public appearance. It argued that

America was not prepared to do battle economically in world markets, that there was an economic crisis, and that the nation must take action to reemerge as the world's preeminent economic power. He discussed what must be done in education, the environment, energy, and foreign policy.

The booklet presented the Tsongas vision, stern about recognizing and facing problems, but inspirational in urging that "the spirit of the American people" should be unleashed so we could return to an ideal America, once again securing "our future and the future of our descendants" (p. 85). The weight and scope of the booklet were impressive at a glance, even daunting, and that impression alone may have served Tsongas's purpose. It is not clear how many recipients actually read this lengthy booklet.

The Tsongas campaign leaflet examined was larger and longer than those of other candidates—three 8 1/2 x 11 sheets, front and back—and the most informative. For those who took the time to penetrate the dense text, Tsongas's pamphlet presented a vision of a return to economic greatness, with him at the helm, summarizing the proposals in "A Call to Economic Arms." The tone was hopeful and optimistic, predicting that "America can once again be the world's number one economic power."

The Buchanan leaflet was short and modest in size (the front and back of an 8 1/2 x 11 page), picturing a smiling Buchanan. The vision he projected in his ten-point plan for "Putting and Keeping America First" was one of cutting programs and saying no. He would "phase out foreign aid," "play hardball in trade talks," "cut tax rates," "veto tax hikes," "freeze Federal spending," and "limit terms for politicians." The language was decisive and firm, conveying a no-nonsense, businesslike image. Buchanan predicted that tax cuts would bring America the "most attractive economic climate in the industrial world," with "millions of new jobs." For those already convinced that the *status quo* in American government was in urgent need of repair, his crisp list might well offer hope. Like Tsongas, he expressed a longing for an ideal America, pledging efforts to regain it: "With God's help, we can hand down to the next generation a country as great and grand and good as the one that our parents gave to us."

Bush's pamphlet, like Tsongas's, was large, covering both sides of three 8 1/2 x 11 sheets, and contained eight pictures. His vision or "Plan to Make New Hampshire and America Move" would "spur economic growth and create jobs for New Hampshire," "provide tax relief for the people of New Hampshire," and "strengthen New Hampshire families." The parts of the plan were highlighted by dark type and generous spacing, and they addressed specific audiences, of businesses and of families longing for tax relief. Bush sounded as though he understood the problems and knew what to do about them. His "Growth Agenda" would "stimulate the economy; help put more money in the pockets of taxpayers, restore consumer confidence, and keep

interest rates and inflation down.' Any reader would find these to be desirable goals: they described a return to happier times.

However, the credibility of the Bush message in evoking a vision of hope was undermined by two factors. First, the pictures did not reinforce the message effectively: he did not look optimistic. A second problem was that the carefully outlined and extensive vision of the future, while well suited to a challenger, seemed inappropriate for an incumbent entering his fourth year as president. Such a future-oriented agenda might well raise questions such as, "Where have you been?"

Candidate Schedules

In contrast to their literature, the candidates' daily schedules (called editors' advisories or press advisories) were targeted to the press. However, they were also published daily in the *Union Leader* (Manchester), thus reaching a much wider audience. The schedule was strictly factual, reporting on the events the candidate would be attending each day. But the selection of groups and subjects addressed and the scope of the campaign effort provided clues to the visions and character traits of the candidates. High numbers of appearances, for example, created an impression of high motivation to win, and of vigor and energy.

Perhaps the most striking finding regarding the schedules was that Tsongas made the fewest public appearances per day. The candidates' average daily number of public and press events was three; for Tsongas it was only two. Such evidence of low activity was not at all in Tsongas's interest. Questions about his health circulated constantly among the press, as he had had cancer and claimed to be fully recovered. But doubts lingered—was he strong enough and well enough to handle the responsibilities of the presidency? The members of the press I talked with interpreted his paucity of appearances as evidence that he had to conserve his strength.

Candidate Speeches

During my week in New Hampshire, I observed sixteen speeches or speech-type events, including debates, dinners, whistle-stop speeches, individual speeches, and rallies. Hundreds of voters a day heard the candidates personally (some of the rallies attracted close to one thousand people). New and personal information, even in small amounts, has been found to carry more weight with voters than abstract information (Popkin, 1991). In a primary in which the difference between the first- and second-place Democrats was only 14,116 votes, and the totals for Kerrey and Harkin differed by only 1,518 votes (*New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1992, p. A21), the thousands who attended speeches,

with their networks of friends and family, could have affected the outcome. Speeches are part of the retail politics still thriving in New Hampshire.

In addition to the role speeches played in communicating directly with interested citizens, speeches by these four candidates were also heavily attended by the media. The television networks showed little of the actual speeches to the public, except for C-SPAN (Kendall, 1993). However, reporters observing the speeches had a chance to form personal impressions of the candidates and their abilities, and to see who came to hear the candidate, how the audience responded, and how the candidate dealt with their questions. These impressions often formed the nucleus of stories on television and in the print media.

The speeches provided excellent opportunities for the candidates to "write the play" their own way. First, the candidates had complete control over the content of the speeches, unlike press conferences or interviews, in which the press led with the questions. They had a chance to show their priorities, as when Buchanan explained his support of the voucher system for schools (Concord, Feb. 11), and Tsongas criticized the proposal for a middle-class tax cut, saying he wanted to be the "pathfinder," not "Santa Claus" (Nashua, Feb. 14). They had a chance to show how much (or how little) they knew, backing up their proposals with evidence, or telling the audience about their experience in solving the problem. They could introduce themselves to the press and the voters as people with unique human qualities and feelings, as when Tsongas joked about his lack of charisma, or Clinton showed his teaching skills, explaining the ramifications of the policies he advocated. They could also use the content of their speeches to stress the campaign themes found in leaflets, ads, and interviews.

Second, the candidates cast their speeches in their own language, making stylistic choices for such purposes as conveying their personal characteristics, or inspiring, or ridiculing. Buchanan's speech at Concord (Feb. 11) attempted all these things. He was tough—he would "play hardball" with countries that "give us a hard time"; we shouldn't be "trade wimps," he said. He was patriotic, calling for a "new patriotism": "Not only America first, but America second and third as well." He ridiculed the Democrats, especially Teddy Kennedy, who would sign a bill "if only he can find his pants." "How many fifty-nine-year-olds do you know," he asked, "who still go to Florida for spring break?" He appealed to deeply held values such as "shared sacrifice" (he would roll back the federal pay raise, turn in half of the president's pay, and call for reduction in the salaries of the boards of directors of automobile companies). He reminded his audience of the principles of the American Revolution; the federal bureaucracy was like the British, he said, spending 25 percent of the GNP. "I hope you will join me in a second American Revolution, and take America back," he concluded.

Vivid words can touch an audience's emotions, making them laugh, and applaud, and nod, and go away full of enthusiasm or anger. Clichés, such as the jokes about Senator Kennedy, a favorite butt of conservative humor, can give audiences a satisfying sense of participation. The candidates' words are at the heart of the campaign ritual, tapping and "intensifying deeply held values" (Nimmo and Combs, 1990, p. 69). Yet they are seldom present in media coverage of the events.

Third, the speeches gave the candidates free media exposure. Except for the cost of travel to the location and press releases distributed in advance, the speech event guaranteed some media attention at a nominal cost.

Fourth, the speeches gave the candidates a chance to make distinctions between themselves and their opponents. As Jamieson (1992) has pointed out, "the longer the statement, the more likely it is to compare and contrast candidates' positions," providing useful information to voters (p. 259). And speeches are long enough to make substantive distinctions. Clinton's speech to the American Association of Retired Persons (Concord, Feb. 13), for example, contrasted his position on health care with that of Bush, and proposed specific reforms, such as uniform billing, the establishment of more group centers, and an emphasis on promoting wellness.

Fifth, speeches gave the candidates a chance to move quickly to meet campaign developments, replying to charges of opponents or media claims immediately. Tsongas responded immediately to a February 13 attack by Harkin on his position on nuclear power (Seabrook); on February 14, Tsongas said, "Tom is playin' fast and loose right now," discussed his support by environmental groups, and proclaimed that if companies violated environmental standards he would "prosecute and prosecute hard" (Nashua). Buchanan built his campaign on attacks against Bush for breaking his promise about "no new taxes", and for being a distant and uncaring figure. Bush's whirlwind campaign day on February 15 could well have been interpreted as a response to Buchanan's attacks, as it was devoted mainly to defending his attempts to revive the economy through a seven-point economic plan. While references to Buchanan were only oblique, his surrogates, such as Senator Warren Rudman, fought off Buchanan's charges with sentences such as, "I've never known a man who suffers when you suffer more than George Bush" (Derry, Feb. 15).

Finally, speeches gave the candidates an opportunity to interact directly with the voters, showing their quickness and adaptability, their knowledge of issues voters inquired about, and, when there were hecklers (as there were with Clinton and Bush), their ability to react well under fire. For example, when Bush was heckled by an ACT-UP AIDS demonstrator shouting, "What about AIDS?", the heckler was quickly removed from the room. But Bush then departed from his text to say, "Understandably, they're upset, but

sometimes their tactics hurt their effort. We are going to whip that disease . . . we're doing everything we can." He then cited figures to show the growth of AIDS research funding during his administration (Derry, Feb. 15).

Some of the candidates, especially Clinton and Tsongas, regularly engaged in long, substantive question periods with audiences, using the opportunity to develop their themes and further shape impressions of their character. Reporters I spoke with remarked on Clinton's ability to speak knowledgeably and at length on a wide variety of public policy issues; they were impressed with his competence. Tsongas, with his quick-witted humor, courage to criticize and reject the popular middle-class tax cut idea, and efforts to dissect and analyze complex issues, also won respect and admiration among the press.

Candidate Television Advertisements

The candidates used ads heavily in a traditional way in New Hampshire, to write the script themselves, uncensored by the media. They cast themselves as the experienced incumbents, as attractive alternatives to the *status quo*, or, in the case of Buchanan, battler against the representative of the *status quo*, Bush.

If the quantity of television advertising is used as a criterion, all of the candidates except Brown established themselves as major characters in the play. Brown spent only \$60,000, but the others spent between \$430,000 (Tsongas) and \$1.4 million (Buchanan) on the New Hampshire primary. Clinton was the top spender on campaign ads among the Democrats in New Hampshire, using 18 ads for a cost of \$950,000; Bush ran 4 ads, spending \$700,000 (Devlin, 1994).

Specific ads by Clinton and Buchanan were notable for their effectiveness in the New Hampshire context: the twelve-minute videotape "American Dream" distributed door-to-door by the Clinton campaign, and Buchanan's "Read My Lips" ads. In addition, Clinton made unusual use of paid television in audience question formats.

During the last weekend before the primary, Clinton distributed twenty thousand free copies of a twelve-minute videotape to undecided households in New Hampshire. The Clinton campaign called recipients and reported that 60 percent to 70 percent had watched the tape (James Carville, comments to press, Feb. 16, 1992). Half of those who watched it reported that they had voted for Clinton (Ceaser and Busch, 1993). This tape made a vigorous effort to construct Clinton as an ideal candidate for New Hampshire. It painted him as a major character in the electoral play, and a character of strong and admirable image traits. But the dominant and most effective emphasis was on his vision of hope for the future.

He spoke constantly of change, of making life better, of the future. Through skillful use of synonyms and repetition, in words full of optimism and determination, he drove the point home. He advocated change (6 repetitions) in the future (4 repetitions), a vision (2 repetitions), a plan (3 repetitions), a dream (3 repetitions). It was a dream for us, for you in the middle class (5); it was your dream and our dream, to work with common purpose (2), to take the responsibility (3) and provide the leadership (6) to "bring this country together again." He would do it with us; we would win again (4), together.

There was tremendous emphasis on winning as a people; Clinton managed to equate *his* winning with *our* winning, taking over the game metaphor that so dominates media coverage of campaigns and changing it from the victory of an individual candidate into the victory of a group, the middle class, and even more specifically, the middle-class voters in New Hampshire, with Clinton as one of them.

In addition to these forms of paid advertising, Clinton also purchased two half hours of time on New Hampshire's largest television station, WMUR, on Thursday and Friday nights, February 13 and 14. He bought the time at the height of the controversy over his draft status during the Vietnam War, and used the first evening for questions from a small studio audience of uncommitted voters, and the second evening for a live call-in show. With these two programs, Clinton dominated television for three nights in a row, for on February 12 he had appeared on "Nightline" with Ted Koppel, discussing his 1969 letter regarding the draft. As a condition of appearing on "Nightline," he had insisted that the entire draft letter be shown on the screen, and Koppel agreed. The letter, which was over 1,200 words long, filled one screen after another, allowing viewers to read it in its entirety. He also paid to have the letter printed in full in the *Union Leader* the next day, and other papers, including the *Concord Monitor*, the *Boston Globe* (partial transcript), and the *New York Times*, published it as news. The result was a blurring together of advertising and news in which voters were presented with Clinton's own construction of the script. Both the degree of candidate control over the language and the quantity of the language were unusual.

Buchanan's New Hampshire ads such as "Protect" and "Broken Promises" contained much large print about Bush's broken promises, and pictures of Bush, particularly the famous "Read my lips, no new taxes" scene from his 1988 acceptance address. "Can we afford four more years of broken promises?" asked the narrator. "Send Bush a message. Vote for Pat Buchanan for president." Symbolically these bold attacks on the president promoted Buchanan as a major character in the play, the only Republican to take on the president of the United States and offer an alternative. Focus groups reported that the "Read My Lips" ads made the biggest impression of all the ads in the

primaries, that they resonated with the voters' anger about Bush; polls confirmed this effect (West, Kern, and Alger, 1992). But Buchanan did little to develop his own character or present a vision of hope. At the end of the ads voters saw Buchanan's smiling face on the screen, and heard his gravelly voice. But they learned nothing about this character in the play, except that he was "not Bush." Unlike his pamphlet, in which he proposed a plan for a presidency of "Putting and Keeping America First," especially through cutting taxes and spending and foreign aid, his television ads devoted themselves mainly to identifying and describing the villain in the play, George Bush. In this he was very successful.

On Election Day, 53 percent of the Republicans voted for Bush, 37 percent for Buchanan, 10 percent for others. The majority of Buchanan voters in exit polls reported that "they were trying to get through to Bush, not backing the challenger" (Richard Benedetto, *USA Today*, Feb. 13, 1992, p. 1). While Bush was still the clear winner of the primary, the anti-Bush vote was surprisingly large. In constructing himself as the antibush, Buchanan gave the Republicans a way to express their anger at the president. He also won favorable attention for having the courage to fight against the odds, in a context in which even prominent Democrats had refused to compete with Bush. But he was never able to gain this much support in other primaries, though he expressed the hope he would begin to win in the South. Instead, his vote percentages dwindled steadily. The Buchanan team's decision to write the script for his opponent's character and not to develop his own character or vision of the presidency was shortsighted for his own candidacy. There are limits to a candidacy cast simply as "not the incumbent." However, Clinton and Perot picked up some of Buchanan's themes and language and employed them effectively later in the campaign.

The Tsongas ad "Swim," in which he swam the difficult butterfly stroke, has been described as "one of the most memorable ads of the primary campaign year" for its visual uniqueness and skillful creation of a metaphor for Tsongas's whole life (Devlin, 1994, pp. 83–84). The ad emphasized his characteristics of strength and determination, describing his victories over corrupt politicians and cancer, the same fighting spirit portrayed in his literature. However, when the ad appeared around the country in ad watches, it worked against him. Instead of being impressed with his strength, viewers raised questions about his cancer and discussed the importance of health in a presidential candidate (West, Kern, and Alger, 1992).

Bush only ran four ads in New Hampshire, with the goals of showing that he cared about people's economic troubles, presenting his economic plan, demonstrating leadership, and asking for votes on Election Day (Devlin, 1994). As president and clear front-runner of the Republicans, Bush was *de facto* a major character in the play. His ads relied heavily on the incumbency

strategies discussed by Trent and Trent in chapter 3 of this book, and in general maintained the themes found in his campaign literature. They ignored Buchanan and his attacks, and portrayed the enemy as the Democratic Congress.

THE MEDIA ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT THE PLAY

Television News Coverage of the Candidates

Kenneth Burke long ago pointed out the power of naming: "Naming . . . [is an] interpretive act," he said, and thus has the power not only to describe but also to shape events (1965, pp. 176–91). This power is clearly seen in the lead stories of television news, in which certain events are named as most deserving of our attention. In the February 11–19, 1992 period, 60 percent (15 out of 25) of the lead stories on ABC, CBS, and NBC were about the New Hampshire primary; two others were about the primaries in general. There is no doubt that the news professionals saw the dramatic potential of this story, which they selected over all the crimes and disasters of the day.

Network Choices of Major and Minor Characters. Previous research on media coverage of campaigns has found that the media measure candidates through a number of means: "opinion polls, assessments by experienced politicians and observers, the status of each candidate's campaign organization, who is supporting whom, the size of the contenders' financial war chests, even the amount of coverage the media themselves give respective candidates" (Nimmo and Combs, 1990, p. 56). We also know from prior research that the media are likely to convey these impressions with heavy use of metaphors, especially metaphors of violence and sports (Blankenship, 1976). These patterns emerged in this study as well.

Network news coverage of the 1992 New Hampshire primary in the February 11–19 period suggested that there were six individuals and two groups who were major or potentially major characters in the campaign play. The individuals were: Buchanan, Bush, Clinton, Harkin, Kerrey, and Tsongas. The groups were the citizen/voters and "Democratic leaders."

The networks gave these individuals and groups status as major characters by two means: by covering them in the news, and by discussing their viability or electability. Citizen/voters were mentioned explicitly or implicitly in every broadcast, usually as numbers. They were the numbers in the polls. Occasionally they were interviewed, and they were often shown meeting candidates or in crowds gathered to hear candidates. The chart below shows the number of days the candidates were mentioned by the networks.

Number of Days Networks Mentioned Candidate, Feb. 11–19
(Possible total: 25)

Clinton	24
Bush	20
Tsongas	19
Buchanan	17
Kerrey	16
Harkin	15
Democratic leaders	9
Cuomo	7
Brown	6
Nader, Ralph	1
Leynane, James	1

The main reason for this order of attention to the candidates seems to be tangled up in the question of candidate viability or electability, a major finding in previous studies (Patterson, 1980, 1993; Robinson and Sheehan, 1983). Network stories discussed everyone's electability; not a candidate was spared. Here at the very start of the campaign, the news focused on the ending: who would win the election? Who could win the election?

Electability also emerged as the most significant trait in the ideal Democrat sought by the Democratic leaders. As portrayed by the networks, these powerful leaders loomed in the wings; at any moment they might push a new candidate onto the stage, or rush onto the stage themselves (Bentsen and Gephardt were mentioned). They were "fearful," "worried," "uneasy," and "unhappy" about the chances of the announced candidates for election, afraid that no one would work out. Their chorus served to magnify the theme.

Network Descriptions of Character Traits. In addition to developing a lineup of major and minor characters in the play, organized around the theme of electability, the networks sketched the personal traits of each candidate. The following summaries attempt to capture the recurring images of the candidates communicated by the words and pictures used by each network.

Buchanan: Buchanan emerged in the three ABC stories as a potentially strong character, powerful enough to embarrass the president, teasing the president by accusing him of stealing his lines (Feb. 12). He was shown fighting hard for votes, going on an ambitious whistle-stop bus tour of the state, and exuding confidence that he would give the president a "wake-up call" (Feb. 17). In the six CBS stories the image was similar but more developed. Buchanan was described as a strong and aggressive candidate, who attacked Bush for betraying the American middle class (Feb. 14). Shown actively

campaigning at rallies, in ads, and during his long bus tour, he was described as having the power to hurt Bush by exposing his flaws (Feb. 17). The question was raised, however, about whether Buchanan had real power or was just a way for the voters to send a message to Bush (Feb. 14).

NBC's coverage was also quite favorable to Buchanan, emphasizing the energetic fighter who used hard-hitting ads and hammered at Bush (Feb. 14, 17).

Bush: The ABC image of President Bush was decidedly mixed, both positive and negative. In their five stories during this period, they showed him as an out-of-touch elitist, worried and fearful about a Buchanan protest vote, and lacking in charisma. Demonstrators were televised carrying signs saying, "Jobs not socks" and something about yachts. On the other hand, the ABC reports showed Bush in his presidential role, as he said that presidents have important things to do, and that elections are not about charisma. The CBS coverage was more negative. While they portrayed Bush as actively and aggressively working for reelection, and indicated that there was no doubt he would be the winner of the Republican primary, they also portrayed him as a worried, defensive player.

Finally, the NBC coverage portrayed a Bush of uncertain stature, a man who on the one hand was aggressively campaigning and fighting to keep Buchanan in the low numbers, and who was more statesmanlike than Buchanan. On the other hand, this was the same Bush who failed to command strong voter support and who never really caught fire with his audiences. In the end, even when he won the primary, the network raised the question of electability (Feb. 19).

Clinton: The networks constructed an ambivalent characterization of Clinton. On ABC there was the ever-present question of electability; he had fallen from the position of front-runner and the party's hope, and now was fighting to save his candidacy, even "scrambling" (Feb. 15). Party leaders said he had been wounded. But his fighting to save himself was shown as a mighty effort, displaying great energy and inventiveness. As he fought, the network selected words and pictures that emphasized his upbeat style and positive personality traits (Feb. 13, 14).

CBS developed a similar ambivalent picture of Clinton in the February 11-18 period. Their questions about his electability were more prominent than ABC's, as they reported his drop in the polls and gave a visible role to the Democratic leaders who doubted his survivability (Feb. 12, 14). As late as February 17, Dan Rather wondered if Clinton might be politically dead. Members of the public were shown coming to his defense, however, lamenting that there was so much "looking for dirt" (Feb. 11), and casting him as a kind of sympathy-evoking underdog figure. In general, CBS emphasized that he was an active, energetic campaigner.

Once the primary results were known, CBS gave Clinton important national attention and a platform for shaping perceptions of his character in a live interview with Dan Rather on the February 19 news broadcast. Considering that Clinton had come in second to Tsongas in New Hampshire, one could ask why this prime-time interview was not with Tsongas. In answer to Rather's questions, Clinton naturally seized the opportunity to portray himself as a strong, competent, honest, experienced candidate who understood what the people wanted.

NBC cast a pall over all the Democratic candidates in their early (Feb. 11) coverage, suggesting that none of the candidates was strong. They presented a mixed picture of Clinton, raising doubts almost nightly, which contributed to a more negative image than that of ABC or CBS. The question of his honesty received much more attention here than on the other networks, chiefly through the voices of citizens discussing the draft issue and marital infidelity (Feb. 11, 18). NBC questioned his electability by pointing to his fall in the polls (Feb. 11, 12) and suggested that his handling of the draft issue had wounded his chances for victory in the South (Feb. 19). On Election Day, anchor Tom Brokaw wondered if Clinton could survive (Feb. 18), just as Dan Rather had done on CBS (Feb. 17).

But NBC also had positive words and pictures for Clinton. They noted that he had a good campaign organization and was well funded (Feb. 11, 13), and that he was aggressively fighting to save his candidacy (Feb. 12). And they let him speak for himself in a vivid moment of his campaign, when he almost pleaded with New Hampshirites to give him a second chance. If they did, he said he would be there for them "til the last dog dies" (Feb. 13).

Tsongas. Tsongas's front-runner status in New Hampshire, based on his standing in the polls, made him a major character in the play, and he was mentioned in nineteen of the twenty-four news broadcasts studied between February 11 and 19. But the networks seemed puzzled by Tsongas, trying out one description and then another. The only characteristic they discussed consistently was his lack of electability, expressing doubts that his success in New Hampshire would carry over to the rest of the country.

In spite of their doubts, they had to explain him to the voters, all the more so when he won the Democratic primary, gaining 34 percent of the votes in a field of five, including votes from many Republicans. This character had the following traits. He was witty (ABC and CBS showed him joking about his charisma, and about a T-shirt he had been given [Feb. 11]). He was a nice guy, who defended Clinton when the draft letter story broke (ABC, Feb. 13), in contrast to Harkin. He was knowledgeable and competent about economic issues (he was shown speaking about the economy, and opposing the middle-class tax cut, NBC, Feb. 14; ABC, Feb. 16). He was courageous, adopting an "I'm no Santa Claus" position on the popular middle-class tax cut. And clearly, as front-runner, he was powerful.

None of the candidates fit the image of the ideal presidential candidate, as they were portrayed by the media. But Tsongas, who had not held a major elective office for eight years, who had not been a dominant figure when he was in the Senate, and who rejected the popular middle-class tax break, deviated from the ideal image enough that the networks portrayed him as an unconventional and unlikely candidate. Tsongas fostered the idea himself at a rally the day before the election, saying, "This is so bizarre. This is so bizarre. I am such an unlikely candidate" (author's notes and NBC, Feb. 17). The networks suggested that Tsongas had simply been lucky in New Hampshire, benefiting from Clinton's problems, from a kind of protest vote against the economic *status quo* (CBS, Feb. 18), and from the advantage of his early entry and proximity to New Hampshire (NBC, Feb. 18). He had little money or backing from leading Democrats (ABC, Feb. 18; NBC, Feb. 19), and both are usually necessary for a successful campaign. And lurking in the background was the question of his health: Would his cancer recur? The question was not discussed openly, but suggested obliquely when Richard Threlkeld asked whether the Tsongas campaign had the "stamina" to last through the primaries (CBS, Feb. 19). Never was the campaign described as energetic or aggressive.

These doubts and qualifications seemed geared to prepare the viewer for an early failed candidacy. Tsongas was a major player now, but he would not last long.

Network Coverage of Candidates' Visions of Hope. The candidates' efforts to project a vision of hope for the future, a positive visualization of what the nation would look like under their presidency, received little attention on network television news. A citizen wishing to determine what the candidates intended to do as president would find little evidence there. These messages were usually contained in candidate speeches, and the networks seldom used candidate language from the speeches. In a few cases they reported a candidate's main theme, such as Tsongas's "call to economic arms" (CBS, Feb. 18). Favorite issues or topics of candidates were sometimes mentioned, such as Clinton's proposal for lower middle-class taxes (NBC, Feb. 14), Tsongas's views of what needed to be done for the environment (NBC, Feb. 17), and Buchanan's opposition to the civil rights bill (NBC, Feb. 19). Perhaps the closest they came to presenting any candidate's vision was with Bush, when they let him speak for himself as he announced his candidacy, told of his goal to reduce the size and cost of government, and described his economic recovery plan (CBS and NBC, Feb. 12). But in general the rhetorical visions of hope enunciated by most of the candidates in their speeches, leaflets, and ads received little explicit attention on the network news.

Newspaper Coverage of the Candidates

The Leading Characters as Portrayed in the Papers. As the newspapers wrote the campaign play on their front pages during the February 11–19 period, Clinton, Tsongas, Bush, and Buchanan were the dominant characters, the same names leading the network stories.³ But there were differences in the way the print media constructed the play. They paid less attention than the networks to the “Democratic leaders” with their gloomy remarks about electability, giving them front-page coverage in only five stories (*USA Today*, Feb. 19; *New York Times*, Feb. 16; *Boston Globe*, Feb. 12 and 18; *Union Leader*, Feb. 18). They made a clearer distinction between major and minor characters than the networks: only four candidates had regular front-page coverage. Television, though it devoted more time to the poll leaders than the others, mentioned and showed six of the seven candidates regularly. The nature of the medium is such that there is no clear front page, middle section or back page on television. When Harkin and Kerrey were shown almost as often as Tsongas and Clinton, for example, that created some equality in prominent coverage, even though Tsongas and Clinton received more time.

In addition, the national press and the regional and local press differed in the four candidates they covered most heavily. In the national papers, Clinton led in frequency of coverage (followed by Bush, Tsongas, and Buchanan), while in the regional and local papers, Bush led in number of stories (followed by Buchanan, Clinton, and Tsongas). On the following page are tables of frequency of front-page textual and pictorial coverage of the candidates during the February 11–19 period. Any mention of a candidate was considered to be coverage of that person, except for straight listing of poll figures.

These figures suggest that the “electability” rule followed in network coverage (electability as measured by the poll standings of the candidates) also governed the papers. For example, the Republican poll standings of February 12, according to the *Boston Globe*/WBZ-TV tracking poll, were: Bush, 50 percent; Buchanan, 29 percent; other, 9 percent; don’t know, 12 percent. The Democratic ratings in the same poll were: Tsongas, 26 percent; Clinton, 20 percent; Harkin, 12 percent; Kerrey, 9 percent; Brown, 6 percent; Cuomo, 6 percent; other, 3 percent; don’t know, 18 percent (*Boston Globe*, Feb. 23, 1992, p. 20). The front-runners received much more coverage than those who were low in the poll standings.

Candidate Characteristics Portrayed in the Newspapers. The newspapers developed the personal characteristics of the cast of characters through their word choice, pictures, and selection of representative anecdotes. This study examined the front-page coverage of the candidates in the 150 stories and 58 pictures of the February 11–19 period, thereby determining which candidate