



Delegates to the 1900 G.O.P. National Convention met in Philadelphia to renominate President William McKinley. But who would replace Vice President Garret A. Hobart, who had died in office? When Theodore Roosevelt got the nod, Ohio's Mark Hanna said to McKinley: "Your duty to the country is to live for four years."

Choosing America's Presidents

The presidential primary election season is about to begin. Nearly every Tuesday night during the coming months, TV anchormen will gravely report that, based on early returns or exit polls, one Democratic candidate has (or has not) pulled away from his rivals, and that a Republican aspirant has (or has not) bested George Bush, the putative G.O.P. "front-runner." Meanwhile, politicians and scholars debate the oft-reformed nominating process: Does it have to be so long and expensive? Does it produce candidates who will be able to govern the country? Here, our contributors explain how the American way of choosing presidents came to be. They describe how the early political parties soon changed the Founding Fathers' system, which twice gave the new republic George Washington as its chief executive, and discuss the origins and effects of today's "primary game."

THE PARTIES TAKE OVER

by James W. Ceaser and Neil Spitzer

Last September 17, several thousand American politicians and foreign dignitaries elbowed into Independence Square in Philadelphia to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution. Addressing the crowd, President Reagan called the constitutional system "the great safeguard of our liberty," and praised the document which "has endured, through times perilous as well as prosperous . . ."

The celebration no doubt would have pleased the 39 men who signed the Constitution in September 1787. The democratic government that they designed has adapted well to the exigencies of modern life. But James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and the other Founding Fathers would have been startled to learn how Mr. Reagan and other recent U.S. presidents have been nominated and elected to office.

The method of presidential selection that the Founders devised and inscribed in the Constitution functioned in its intended form for only two elections (in 1789 and 1792). Moreover, their method bears little re-

semblance to today's drawn-out nomination and election campaigns.

The Founders created a body that became known as the Electoral College—a group of men, chosen by the states, who would elect the president. The college, the Founders hoped, would both temper the electorate's wishes and ensure that successful candidates enjoyed a broad mandate. The college still exists, and candidates still campaign to win electoral votes. But political parties have altered the Electoral College's role. The parties choose the electors, who no longer exercise their own discretion as the Founders thought they would. Instead, electors vote for their party's choice—in December, long after the stress and pageantry of the autumn presidential campaign have faded away.

No Campaigning, Please

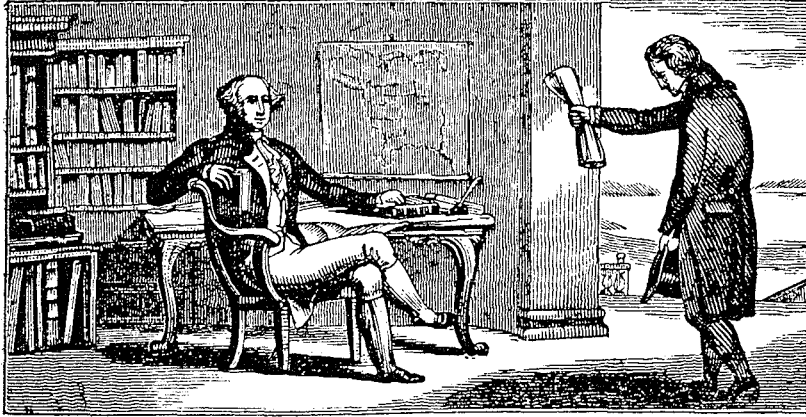
Although the Founders opposed them, political parties have, ironically, performed many of the functions that the Founders hoped the Electoral College would perform. The two major parties have generally moderated ideological extremes, tamed political ambitions, and helped mute sectional differences. In doing so, they have enabled Americans to select or reject candidates for the presidency in an orderly fashion, without triggering coups, civil strife, or mob rule.

Though short lived, the Founders' system for electing the president was not created without considerable thought and reflection. The 55 delegates who assembled at the Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall) on May 25, 1787, debated the matter of presidential selection many times. This was, as Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson said, "the most difficult of all [issues] on which we have to decide."

Most of the delegates shared several guiding principles as the Constitutional Convention began. They believed that the presidential election was a process that should be considered central to (not apart from) the presidency. They argued that the election, like the office itself, should not encourage *radical* change, because that harms a republic. Moreover, choosing the executive, they thought, should encourage ambitious men to pursue the presidency by acting in ways that would be helpful to the Republic. Thus, the election should be a *retrospective* process, with the emphasis on the aspirants' previous records, not a prospective exercise based on campaign promises. Indeed, the Founders did not envision any "campaign" at all.

Several different plans for electing the president circulated at the Philadelphia convention. The Virginia Plan, which 33-year-old Virginia governor Edmund Randolph read to the convention on May 29, proposed

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Washington receives word of his election. Congress considered referring to the chief executive as "His Excellency," "Elective Majesty," "His Serene Highness," and "Elective Highness," before settling on "Mr. President."

that the national legislature select the executive.* Connecticut's Roger Sherman favored the plan, because it would make the executive "absolutely dependent on that body."

The convention's "nationalists," however, wanted a system of electing the president that would keep the executive and legislative branches of government as "independent as possible of each other." The nationalists, notably James Wilson, favored a direct popular election. But that idea struck some delegates as impractical; suffrage qualifications, after all, varied from state to state. Some delegates thought that the voters might not be qualified for the task. It would "be as unnatural to refer the choice of a proper character for a chief Magistrate to the people," observed Virginia's George Mason, as it would "to refer a trial of colours to a blind man."

During July and August 1787, the Philadelphia convention repeatedly returned to the same issues. The delegates voted five times in favor of having the president appointed by Congress, only to change their minds. Individual delegates proposed, variously, that the chief executive's term last three, seven, eight, 15, and 30 years, or even for life. In all, the convention cast 60 ballots on different proposals for electing the president.

On August 24, the convention's delegates, out of frustration, turned over a host of unresolved matters—including the election of the executive—to a Committee on Postponed Parts. On September 4, the committee recommended a plan that had been proposed earlier: the election of the president by a group of electors "equal to the whole number of

*The convention did not decide to call the executive "the president" until September 1787.

Senators and members of the House of Representatives.”

According to the plan, each state would appoint presidential electors in a way to be decided by the state legislatures. Voting in their home states, the electors would cast two ballots each for president. The ballots would then be sent to the national capital, where they would be counted by the president of the Senate. The candidate receiving the highest number of votes would become president—if he received at least the number of votes equal to a majority of the number of electors. The runner-up would become vice president.

The Founders awarded each elector two ballots to make it probable that one candidate would receive enough votes to win. To give candidates from small states a chance, the elector had to cast at least one ballot for a candidate from outside the elector’s home state. So that electors would not waste their second votes on unworthy candidates, the committee created the position of vice president—an office that none of the delegates had even mentioned previously.

“Such an officer as vice-President was not wanted,” as North Carolina’s Hugh Williamson later conceded. “He was introduced only for the sake of a valuable mode of election which required two [candidates] to be chosen at the same time.”

George Washington’s Worry

The convention delegates initially decided that if there was a tie, or if no candidate received enough votes to win, the Senate would choose the president from among the five highest vote-getters. But James Wilson rose to protest. The president, he argued, ought to be a man of the people, not a “Minion of the Senate.” The delegates agreed that the House of Representatives would settle “contingent” elections. To give small states more say, congressmen would vote as members of state delegations, with each state casting one vote.

Not everyone was delighted with the contingent election plan. Madison considered the House scheme “pregnant with a mischievous tendency.” Jefferson, who was not at the convention, later called it “the most dangerous blot in our constitution.”

Though the convention set up the system to produce a winner, some delegates nevertheless thought that “contingent” elections would take place often—perhaps even “nineteen times in twenty,” as George Mason predicted. After George Washington, they reckoned, no candidate would receive a clear-cut majority, and the electors would, in effect, present nominees to the House of Representatives.

The delegates included an age requirement (35) to make it likely that the candidates would have a record of public service that others could judge. To attract capable men for the job, the convention awarded the executive a lengthy term of office (4 years), for which he could run as many times as he wished. The entire plan was embodied in Article II,

Section I of the Constitution.

The Electoral College formula was one of the Constitution's most innovative features. It had no precedent, either in Britain or in any of the American states. Significantly, it kept the executive independent of the legislature, as the "nationalists" had insisted. It was democratic enough to reflect the public's wishes, but select enough to thwart a dangerous popular candidate. Because it was not "pre-established," the college could not be manipulated in advance of the election. Thirty-two-year-old Alexander Hamilton called the system for selecting the president "excellent, if not perfect."

It was also quite temporary.

The first election took place as the Founders had intended. On the first Wednesday in January 1789, the voters in four states (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware) went to the polls to vote for the electors, who had been nominated by informal caucuses in the state legislatures, or by friends and neighbors. In the other six voting states, the legislatures chose the electors. One month later, the electors sent their ballots by mail to the capital, New York.*

Politicians must have pondered two unknowns. First, would George Washington, the electors' one and only choice for president, accept the job? His ambivalence toward accepting the task was well known. But he decided, as he wrote to Benjamin Franklin, to "forego repose and domestic enjoyment," at his beloved Mount Vernon, "for trouble, perhaps for public obloquy."

Jefferson's Gazette

Second, would the Senate gather the quorum needed for the president of the Senate to count the votes? By March 4, the day the Senate was appointed to count the electoral votes, only eight members of the upper house had arrived in New York. It took over four weeks and an urgent announcement, stressing "the indispensable necessity of putting the government into immediate operation" before a quorum (12 out of 22 senators) could be assembled.

George Washington, 57 years old, was elected president of the United States unanimously, winning one vote from each of the 69 electors. Runner-up John Adams, who collected 34 electoral votes, became vice president. Ten other minor candidates won 35 votes combined.

The first presidential election must have pleased the Founders. A distinguished body of electors had quietly selected the most capable men for the presidency and vice presidency. There had been no competition,

*The first congressional elections took place in the fall of 1788 and the winter of 1789. The state legislatures chose U.S. senators until the ratification of the 17th Amendment (1913), which called for direct election of senators. U.S. representatives were chosen by direct election from the start. Generally, candidates were nominated informally, by friends or by a caucus of state legislators. Newspapers and "committees of correspondence" publicized their candidacies. In most states, only white, male property owners could vote. They did so orally, before a polling official who wrote down the voter's choice.

no partisan squabbling, no grand promises, and no demagoguery. Most of all, there had been no parties. The “great object” of the new government, as James Madison had explained in *The Federalist*, was to “secure the public good and private rights against the danger of such a faction [party], and at the same time to preserve the spirit and form of popular government.”

Whatever the Founders’ notions about parties, it quickly became clear that the American presidency was intrinsically a political office. As chief executive, Washington possessed the power to promote his views, to rally his political allies, and to ensure that the new government would carry out the public’s business as he saw fit.

The first parties emerged as rival factions, in both the fledgling administration and Congress, during Washington’s first term. The feuding started when Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton proposed that the federal government assume the states’ debts and create a national bank. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson opposed Hamilton’s “system” because it centralized power at the expense of the states.

Pro- and anti-Hamilton groups formed in Congress. Senators and representatives from New England supported Hamilton and his policies. But their colleagues from Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina generally followed the lead of Representative James Madison, a staunch Jeffersonian who led the anti-Hamilton forces in Congress.



Calling Aaron Burr a “Catiline of America,” Alexander Hamilton helped stop the New Yorker from becoming president in 1800. But Burr got revenge, killing Hamilton in a duel at Weehawken, New Jersey, on July 11, 1804.

Neither Jefferson nor Hamilton shied away from involving the press in their disputes. In August 1791, Jefferson hired New York editor Philip Freneau to work in the tiny State Department, ostensibly as a translating clerk. But Jefferson directed his new employee to start publishing the *National Gazette*. The new paper was needed, Jefferson argued, to counter the “hymns & lauds chanted” by the “paper of pure Toryism,” the strongly pro-Hamilton *Gazette of the United States*. Meanwhile, Washington, who refused to align himself with either group, worried that the “attacks upon almost every measure of government” with which “the Gazettes are so strongly pregnated,” threatened to “rend the Union asunder . . .”

Partisan editors helped to widen the breach between the two nascent parties. In editorials and news stories, Hamiltonians (or “Federalists”) referred to their opponents as disorganizers, Jacobins—and Democrats, then a derogatory term. The Jeffersonians (or “Republicans”) called their adversaries Monarchists, Tories, and Royalists. By the end of Washington’s first four-year term, the parties, though still loosely knit, were firmly in place. “Party animosities here [in Philadelphia],” Jefferson wrote to a colleague in October 1792, “have raised a wall between those who differ in political sentiments.”

Despite all the partisan discord, Washington was re-elected unanimously in 1792. But George Clinton, the immensely popular Republican governor of New York, decided to challenge the Federalist incumbent John Adams for the vice presidency. During this contest, the two fledgling parties took the first big step in altering the role of the Electoral College: Party leaders began to nominate the presidential electors.

‘Baneful Effects’

In Massachusetts, for example, a party circular exhorted voters to cast their ballots for a “slate” of electors, which party managers had drawn up “for the purpose of concentrating the suffrages.” In all 15 states, the electors cast one ballot for Washington. In casting their other ballots for Adams or Clinton, the electors did not exercise their own discretion, but voted for their party’s candidate. Little wonder then, that in all but two states the winning slates of electors voted *en bloc* for either Adams or Clinton. Adams swept New England and retained the vice presidency.

The parties further transformed the Electoral College system four years later, during the presidential election of 1796. In September, George Washington announced that he would not seek a third term as president. In his famous Farewell Address, he warned that “the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party” constituted the “worst enemy” of popular governments. But “baneful effects” were everywhere in evidence during the election, which evolved into a contest between Republicans and Federalists. Neither John Adams nor Thomas Jefferson *campaign*ed for the

presidency as party candidates. But their supporters made it clear to which party each candidate belonged. "Thomas Jefferson is a firm Republican," proclaimed one widely circulated handbill. "John Adams is an avowed Monarchist."

Neither party needed formally to nominate Jefferson or Adams since each was the obvious candidate. But who would serve as vice president?

Neither Federalists nor Republicans in Congress would leave that decision in the hands of independent electors. There was too much at stake now. Not only did the Federalists and Republicans each want to win the presidency; they also wanted to make sure that the other party's presidential candidate did not win the vice presidency by collecting the second highest number of electoral votes. So members of each party in the House and Senate met at two different party assemblies, or caucuses, to choose a vice presidential candidate who would receive the electors' second votes. Little is known about what transpired at the caucuses. The early ones were held in secret.

The Federalist caucus chose Thomas Pinckney, the former governor of South Carolina, as its candidate for vice president. The Republican caucus could not settle on a nominee. Some favored the irascible New York senator Aaron Burr; others supported South Carolina senator Pierce Butler. Jefferson was left without a running mate.

In the end, the election of 1796 produced a strange result. Adams, the Federalist candidate, collected the highest number of electoral votes (71), thus winning the presidency. Some of the Federalist electors who voted for Adams, however, did not cast their other votes for Pinckney. Instead, Thomas Jefferson, Adams' arch rival, finished second, capturing the vice presidency.

Caucus of Conspiracy?

The parties' roles in choosing electors and nominating candidates had begun informally. Neither the Republicans nor the Federalists thought that the parties would last very long; they were formed only to head off their opponents, who they believed were subverting the Constitution. But before long, party nominations became, in the presidential election, regular, quasi-official events.

In the election of 1800, both parties held congressional caucuses to nominate presidential candidates. On May 11, 1800, 43 Republican senators and representatives congregated at Marache's Boarding House on Fourth Street in Philadelphia, and chose Jefferson for president and Burr for vice president. The Federalists held their own conclave in the Senate Chamber. "Each member in his state," the Federalists announced, should "use his best endeavors to have Mr. Adams and Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney run for President, without giving one a preference to the other."



In 1836, Whig editors, in the highly partisan style of the day, lambasted the Democratic nominee, Martin Van Buren. The New York Courier and Enquirer compared him to "the mole burrowing near the ground; the pilot fish who plunges deep in the ocean in one spot and comes up in another to breathe the air."

Their best endeavors were not enough. Jefferson and Burr won the contest in the Electoral College, in an unprecedented display of party solidarity. Indeed, there was too much solidarity. The Republicans had planned to withhold several electoral votes from Burr, to guarantee that Jefferson would win the presidency. But somehow, each candidate received 73 electoral votes.

The situation was almost tragicomic: Which victor would serve as president, and which as vice president? Before passage of the 12th Amendment in 1804, the ballots did not distinguish between president and vice president, even though everyone understood who was running for which office. Despite Burr's offer to "utterly disclaim any competition," the House of Representatives had to break the stalemate. Some Federalists hatched a plot to foil the Republicans, and elect Burr over Jefferson. But the scheme broke down when Alexander Hamilton, the most influential Federalist, suggested that the Virginian would make the better chief executive. Still, the House needed 36 ballots before Jefferson was elected president.

Although both parties held congressional caucuses to nominate candidates in 1800, the caucus system stirred bitter controversy. The Boston *Columbian Centinel* voiced the pro-caucus view. Members of Congress, the paper claimed, "were better qualified to judge of the dangers, the resources, and prospects of federalism in the union at large, than any individual in the several states could possibly be."

The Republican *Aurora* reprinted the editorial and criticized “this factious meeting, this self appointed, self elected, self delegated club or caucus, or conspiracy.” The editors were outraged that “about 24 persons” were deciding “for the people of the United States who should be president and vice president.”

After 1800, support for the Federalist Party began to wane, leaving the Republicans with opponents whom they could consistently beat. Between 1800 and 1820, every candidate whom the Republican caucus endorsed (Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe) was elected. Thus, for six straight elections, the Republican caucus was, in effect, choosing the president of the United States.

Henry Clay's Lament

But “King Caucus” was never as omnipotent as its critics feared. Indeed, when it existed, the conclave could not generate a consensus. It could only reflect one. By nominating Jefferson in 1800 and 1804, and James Madison in 1808, the caucus merely recognized the Republicans' popular choice. In 1812 the caucus selected Madison again, but a group of anti-Madison Republicans and Federalists favored New York governor DeWitt Clinton. In 1816 the Republican caucus selected James Monroe, but the New Yorkers endorsed someone else again—this time, Governor Daniel D. Tompkins. Other disgruntled Republicans backed former senator William H. Crawford of Georgia. Within the 1816 Republican caucus, Monroe bested Crawford by only 11 votes, 65 to 54. The whole affair was, in Henry Clay's words, “a spurious and unhallowed act.”

Clay was not the only critic. Others charged that the caucus was undemocratic and that it represented a violation of the Founders' intentions by placing the president, as John Quincy Adams expressed it, “in a state of undue subservience to the legislature.” Newspapers excoriated the caucus institution in lengthy editorials. “As my soul liveth,” wrote Hezekiah Niles in the *Niles Weekly Register*, “I would rather learn that the halls of Congress were converted into common brothels than that caucuses of the description stated should be held in them.”

By 1824 King Caucus was so unpopular that it presented more of a liability than an asset to the candidate it endorsed. When the Republican caucus convened in the Capitol on the evening of February 14, hostile spectators shouted “adjourn! adjourn!” from the gallery above. The few senators and representatives who braved the heckling (only 66 out of 240 turned out) nominated William H. Crawford for president.

The experienced Georgian faced stiff opposition from four other candidates: Secretary of State John Quincy Adams; Secretary of War John C. Calhoun; the popular Speaker of the House, Henry Clay; and a Tennessee lawyer and military hero named Andrew Jackson.

Crawford's supporters defended the caucus, arguing, ironically, that it carried little weight. The conclave's recommendation, observed the

New Hampshire Patriot, possessed “neither the force of a law nor the authority of a command.” The people, the paper pointed out, were at liberty to disregard the caucus’s suggestion. Others called the caucus “the good old way,” and “the old democracy,” and pointed out that it had given the nation Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe.

Such claims proved unconvincing. Many of the states ignored the caucus’s choice, and nominated their own favorite sons. The South Carolina legislature backed John C. Calhoun. The Kentucky and Missouri legislatures endorsed Henry Clay. Conventions in Tennessee and Pennsylvania conferred their blessings on “Old Hickory,” Andrew Jackson. Massachusetts and Maine favored Adams. “The period has surely arrived,” declared the Pennsylvania convention’s delegates, “when a president should be elected from the ranks of the people.”

With support for each candidate so regionally fragmented, no single presidential aspirant could muster an Electoral College majority. Crawford, the caucus nominee, finished a dismal third after Jackson and Adams. The House of Representatives had to decide the election. Clay threw his support to John Quincy Adams, who won. Even before Adams made Clay his secretary of state, Jackson claimed that the two men had struck a deal and that the election had been stolen.

The Little Magician

The election of 1824 marked the end of King Caucus. With party competition gone, nominating a candidate made little sense. Most politicians welcomed this “Era of Good Feeling,” during which public affairs, as they saw it, would be free of intrigues and partisan strife.

Senator Martin Van Buren of New York, however, did not believe that a republic without parties would serve the public interest. Only parties, he stressed, could transcend regional factions, nominate candidates with broad appeal, produce a consensus on legislative issues, and get the president and Congress to work together. Though long considered a relatively undistinguished one-term president (1837–1841), many scholars now consider the “Little Magician,” as Van Buren’s friends called him, responsible for establishing national party competition in the United States.

In Van Buren’s view, the 1824 election had produced exactly what the Founders had set out to avoid: a popular election, in which a large number of candidates variously appealed to the populace on narrow grounds, moving “the bitter waters of political agitation,” as Van Buren said, “to their lowest depths.” Indeed, the contest had fostered a kind of popular demagoguery, which threatened national unity and constitutional government. Without parties, Van Buren feared, the House would have to settle inconclusive elections all too often.

As a senator from New York, Van Buren set out to re-establish the two-party system by recreating the old Republican and Federalist par-

ties. Indeed, Van Buren sought to unite "General Jackson's personal popularity with the portion of old party feelings yet remaining" by forming a coalition between "the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North."

A master politician, Van Buren was well suited to the task. "His strength lay in his suavity," New York editor Horace Greeley remarked of him. "He was the reconciler of the estranged, the harmonizer of those who were feuding among his fellow partisans." Members of the new party would call themselves "Democratic-Republicans" or just "Democrats." Old Hickory would head the party's ticket in 1828.

Inventing the Convention

To Van Buren, Jackson's 1828 campaign presented both a danger and an opportunity. Jackson, after all, was not a party man. A victory for Jackson alone would only further the "name politics" that Van Buren opposed. But if the Tennessean committed himself to the party and its principles, his election, Van Buren believed, would "be worth something." The Little Magician wanted parties to nominate presidential candidates, perhaps at a national nominating convention. To publicize his ideas, Van Buren enlisted the support of Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Richmond (Va.) *Enquirer*.

In a letter to Ritchie, Van Buren argued that national conventions would help the Republicans "by substituting *party principles* for *personal preferences* as one of the leading points in the contest." Such an assembly, he went on, would force New England Republicans "to decide between indulgence in sectional & personal feelings," and "acquiescence in the fairly expressed will of the party, on the other." Finally, Van Buren reflected that "the call of such a convention, its exclusive Republican character, & the refusal of Mr. Adams and his friends to become parties to it, would draw anew the old Party lines."

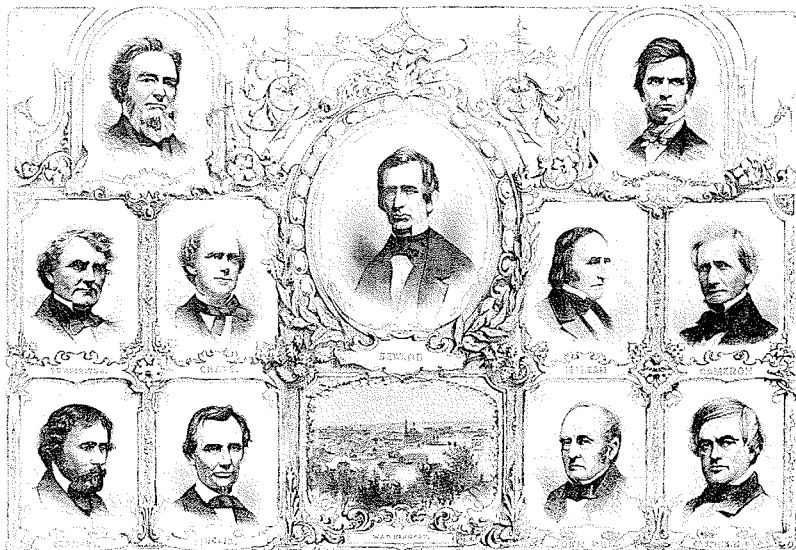
In the end, the Little Magician's political acumen helped pave the way for Jackson. On a trip to Georgia, Van Buren convinced Senator William H. Crawford to stay out of the 1828 presidential race. Another possible competitor, South Carolina's John C. Calhoun, voluntarily declined to run. Van Buren prudently chose not to hold a national convention. A fight over the vice presidential nomination, he feared, would shatter his fragile anti-Adams coalition. "Let it [the vice presidential nomination] be left to the natural course of public sentiment," he wrote to Jackson, "& it will fare best."

Instead, Jackson and his running mate, John C. Calhoun, were nominated by a series of state conventions and caucuses. The presidential election, meanwhile, had grown steadily more democratic. In 21 of the nation's 24 states, the voters—as opposed to the state legislatures—now chose the electors. Jackson defeated John Quincy Adams handily, winning 178 out of 261 electoral votes.

The convention idea, however, remained attractive. Critics had attacked the congressional nominating caucus because it was undemocratic and because it violated the constitutional separation of powers by having members of Congress nominate candidates for president. The national nominating convention, however, brought together a much larger pool of party activists from the states, most of whom did not even hold public office. Moreover, the convention, unlike the caucus, expressed the wishes of all of the state parties, whether or not they enjoyed representation in Congress.

In any case, the national parties experimented with conventions for the first time in the presidential election of 1832. The small Anti-Mason Party and the National Republican Party (basically a front for Henry Clay and his supporters) held separate conventions in a Baltimore tavern called the Atheneum in late 1831. Andrew Jackson's Democratic-Republicans staged their first national convention in Baltimore. The event, as historian James S. Chase has observed, "was a sure sign of the Jacksonians' coming of age as a party."

The first Democratic convention was not a well-rehearsed affair. Each state party decided how to choose its delegates. In Ohio and Indiana, the party elected delegates at state conventions. In Georgia, county meetings instructed the state's congressional delegation to represent the state in Baltimore. In New Jersey, a party caucus authorized public meetings to choose the delegates.



In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was one of many challengers when he upset Sen. William H. Seward (N.Y.) to win the Republican Party's nomination.

The Baltimore convention renominated Jackson for president, and nominated Van Buren for vice president. The assembly also gave the institution of conventions a ringing endorsement. One New Hampshire delegate called the convocation to order in the hope that "the people would be disposed, after seeing the good effects of this convention in conciliating the different and distant sections of the country, to continue this mode of nomination."

In the 1832 election, Jackson won again by a wide margin, this time over the National Republican candidate, Henry Clay.

Despite Jackson's victory, the question lingered: Could the Democratic Party flourish without the benefit of Old Hickory's popularity? The election of 1836 would provide the test.

To gather his forces, Van Buren, the leading Democratic presidential prospect, called for a national convention, which assembled on May 20, 1835, at Baltimore's Fourth Presbyterian Church. The show of Democratic strength was impressive. There were more than 600 delegates from 22 states. The convention chose Van Buren as the party's presidential nominee. An official party statement expressed the nominee's view that the convention was "the best means of concentrating the popular will."

The 1836 contest became, in part, a referendum on national political parties and nominating conventions. The opposing Whig Party—a coalition of former National Republicans and other Anti-Jacksonians—campaigning not only against the Democrats, but against the "undemocratic" party assemblies. "The multitudes cannot go to caucuses and conventions," said one Whig newspaper, "[which] are made up of officeholders and their agents."

The Whigs Reconsider

Believing that no single candidate could defeat Van Buren in a national election, the Whigs nominated three regional favorites for president at state conventions and caucuses. Their plan was to deny Van Buren an electoral majority, thus throwing the contest into the House of Representatives. The unorthodox strategy failed: Van Buren scored a decisive electoral victory.

Defeat forced the Whigs to reconsider the importance of party unity. From then on, they would show more interest in national conventions and consensus candidates. "We must run but one candidate," observed Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden, "lest we break up and divide when it is so necessary that we stay together and defeat Van Buren and Jacksonianism."

The election of 1836 brought party politics to maturity. From then on, all major U.S. political parties would hold quadrennial presidential nominating conventions. During the rest of the 19th century, the convention provided a way for the parties to select candidates, draft plat-

forms, and galvanize the rank and file around their nominee.

In retrospect, it is interesting to note how dramatically the modern system for selecting U.S. presidents differs from the Founding Fathers' original designs.

Political parties, acting with little reflection or foresight, altered the Electoral College's role in two major ways. First, the parties, beginning in 1792, began choosing slates of electors, who would not exercise their independent discretion (as the Founders intended), but vote for their party's choice. Second, the parties began nominating the candidates, first at congressional caucuses, and later at national conventions.

Today, it is easy to forget about the Electoral College. But the college endures. When Americans go to the polls this November, most will find the names of the presidential candidates on their ballots. But technically they will not be voting for the candidates themselves, but for either the Republican or the Democratic Party's slate of electors. Because each slate will be committed to voting for the party's candidate, Americans, *in effect*, will be voting in a direct popular election.

Were they now alive, the Founders might or might not like how political parties have changed their scheme for electing the president. But the parties have managed to transcend regional enmities (with the notable exception of the Civil War), prevent the emergence of demagogic leaders, and ensure that the winning candidate enjoys wide national support. Even as America has grown from a sparsely populated wilderness into a heterogeneous industrial society, the parties have served to "blunt the edge of disappointed ambition," as editor Thomas Ritchie promised they would, and "disarm the rage of maddened factions."

To modern Americans, it may seem surprising that the Founders could have imagined a republic—and the election of its leaders—without political parties. As it happens, the "Spirit of Party" has not been "the worst enemy" of popular government in America, as George Washington predicted, but one of its better friends.

THE PRIMARY GAME

by Jack Walker

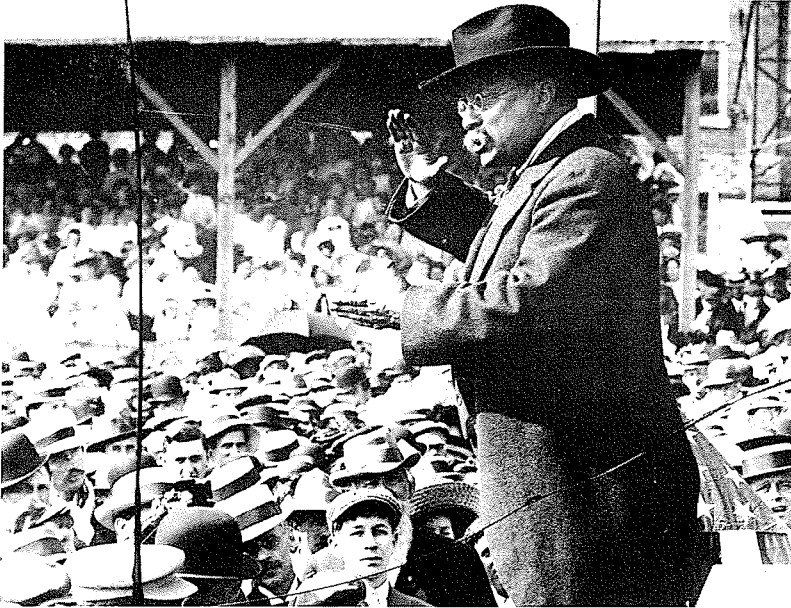
When Senator Gary Hart (D.-Colo.) bested former vice president Walter Mondale in the New Hampshire Democratic primary almost four years ago, his upset victory dazzled some press and television commentators. Declared CBS News correspondent Bob Simon: "Now there are two front-runners."

But the election disturbed many pundits and Democratic politicians; it seemed to demonstrate just how volatile the process of choosing presidential nominees had become. Echoing other complaints, the *New Republic* warned that this "bizarre system," which "makes it possible for a near unknown to get a grip on a major party nomination in the course of three or four weeks of frenzied excitement, could someday produce a genuine monster."

Since then, the system has not become any less unpredictable. Consider this year's campaign for the Democratic and Republican nominations; most of the contenders had begun campaigning by 1986, over two years before the general election. They have expended most of their effort not in canvassing large cities and populous suburbs in New York or California, but in roaming from county fairs to coffee klatches in towns and hamlets in Iowa and New Hampshire. These rural states are the first on the 1988 calendar to hold caucuses and primaries.

Most of the candidates will drop out of the race before the parties hold their national conventions this summer: The Democrats will convene this July in Atlanta; the Republicans will meet in August in New Orleans. Two Democrats who failed to survive intense press scrutiny (former senator Gary Hart and Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.) have already quit. The remaining hopefuls know that a poor showing in the Iowa caucuses (February 8) and the New Hampshire primaries (February 16) may force them to bow out too, as donors of campaign funds seek out better prospects. And the chances are good that after "Super Tuesday," March 8, when 12 Southern states will hold their primaries, only two or three candidates from each party will still be in the race—weeks before primary voters in New York (April 19), Pennsylvania (April 26), and California (June 7) make their preferences known.

The system is not only peculiar but also blatantly unfair, according to its many critics. Primary elections, they say, are expensive and time-consuming popularity contests, which discourage many qualified officeholders from entering the race. As the first to vote, Democrats and Republicans in Iowa and New Hampshire will have more influence in selecting the parties' nominees than will their counterparts in Texas and



Running on the Bull Moose ticket in 1912, Teddy Roosevelt inspired many campaign jingles: "I want to be a Bull Moose,/And with the Bull Moose stand/With Antlers on my forehead/And a Big Stick in my hand."

California. And because the more ideologically fervent 19 percent of the eligible voters go to the polls during primaries, the nominating system, the critics argue, fails to produce moderate nominees who can win the general election *and* govern effectively once in the White House.

"There is something wrong with a nominating process that gives one state [Iowa] the loudest voice and then produces candidates who cannot even carry that state [in the general election]," said one candidate, first term U.S. senator Albert Gore, Jr., (D.-Tenn.), last November. "We [Democrats] have lost four of the last five elections . . . Isn't it time for a change?"

Would-be reformers believe it is. Each party, they suggest, should hold several regional primaries, or one national primary, to make the nominating process shorter and more reflective of the wishes of Democrats and Republicans nationwide. Change party rules, others say, to bring the experienced politicians and local party leaders back into the nominating game. Lloyd Cutler, former counsel to President Jimmy Carter, has suggested that each party's 435 candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, plus its 100 Senate candidates and incumbent senators, should automatically serve as uncommitted delegates to their parties' national conventions. Journalist Robert Shogan has advocated the

nomination of candidates by "a caucus of elected officials, expanded perhaps to include representatives of major constituent groups."

All of these ideas are well intentioned. But when one analyzes why the U.S. presidential nominating system has become an exhausting and expensive process, primary elections, or the composition of convention delegations, are not entirely to blame. The way Americans now choose their presidential candidates has less to do with specific party rules and procedures than with the fact that the two major political parties have lost many of their historic functions.

As historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., explained a decade ago: "The decline of immigration deprived the political organization of its classic clientele. The rise of the Civil Service limited its patronage. The New Deal took over its welfare role . . . The electronic revolution has abolished [the two parties'] mediatorial function. Television presents the politician directly to the voter, who makes his judgment more on what Walter Cronkite [of CBS] and John Chancellor [of NBC] show him than on what the party leaders tell him."

Other trends have weakened the party system too. As Americans have become better educated, they have also become more likely to vote for candidates as individuals, less likely to vote for "the party." And since the 1960s, various "movements," (such as those on behalf of blacks, women, and homosexuals) which have helped to make American politics more democratic and inclusive, have also made the game of politics, and the process of choosing presidential candidates, more susceptible to conflict and disarray.

Would-be reformers should remember that primary elections are not a new phenomenon in American politics.

Teddy Roosevelt's Campaign

Primaries first emerged around the turn of the century as one result of middle-class protests against the selection of candidates by party bosses in "smoke-filled" rooms. Progressive Era politicians, notably Wisconsin's Robert M. La Follette and New Jersey's Woodrow Wilson, favored the referendum, the direct election of U.S. senators, and primary elections as ways of making government more responsive to the citizenry and less beholden to "bosses and the machines." Wilson supported primaries because he believed that the citizenry should choose its leaders and that leaders should form political parties according to their political views. "Eight words," Wilson wrote, "contain the sum of the present degradation of our political parties: No leaders, no principles; no

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principles, no parties.”

In 1905, at La Follette’s urging, the Wisconsin legislature passed one of the first laws providing for the direct popular election of delegates to the national party convention. Not without considerable debate, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and other states soon followed suit. By the spring of 1912, when Theodore Roosevelt declared that “My hat is in the ring”—that he would challenge incumbent William Howard Taft for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination—14 states had passed laws instituting the direct primary election.

Campaigning in states that held primaries, Roosevelt charged that the incumbent had yielded to “the bosses and to the great privileged interests.” The former president, a vigorous and colorful candidate, scored spectacular victories in California, Illinois, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, but failed to win over local party leaders. After Taft won the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Chicago in June, Roosevelt’s supporters retreated to Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, and agreed to hold their own party convention the following August. The Progressive or Bull Moose* Party, as Roosevelt’s supporters called their organization, nominated him for president, and adopted a platform which endorsed, among other things, “nation-wide preferential primaries for candidates for the presidency.”

The Fading of Reform

Roosevelt’s third-party challenge split the normal G.O.P. vote, and helped throw the election to the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson, then governor of New Jersey. As president, Wilson urged Congress to pass a bill setting up a national presidential primary so that “the several parties may choose the nominees for the Presidency without the intervention of nominating conventions.”

The presidential primary bill made little headway. But thanks to the efforts of Progressives, 23 states had adopted some form of the primary by 1916. Primaries, however, enjoyed more theoretical than practical appeal. These contests produced only about one-third of the delegates that a candidate needed to win the nomination. Both Herbert Hoover (in 1928) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (in 1932) officially entered primaries, but did not campaign in any of them. At the time, candidates won the party’s nomination, as historian James MacGregor Burns has noted, not by a “great campaign through the nation but by a series of guerrilla battles, by tortuous, often undercover manipulation [of local party leaders] in each of the states.”

The Progressives’ reform efforts faded after World War I under pressure from party officials who resisted surrendering control of the nominating process. Between 1920 and 1949, only one state, Alabama,

*The name comes from a remark that Roosevelt made at the G.O.P. convention. Optimistic about his chances of defeating Taft, TR said to a reporter: “I’m feeling like a bull moose.”

adopted a presidential primary law. And eight of the 26 states that had passed laws setting up primaries abandoned them by 1935. State governments, after all, had to pay for primaries, which were not inexpensive to hold. "So far as expressing the preference of the voters," stated a 1932 North Dakota report, "... the [primary] election [of 1928] was a farce which cost the taxpayers of the state \$135,635."

During the 1940s and 1950s, however, challengers to front-runners began entering primaries—not so much to win delegates as to demonstrate their vote-getting prowess. Sometimes the stratagem backfired. In 1948, Minnesota's 41-year-old former governor, Harold Stassen, staked his chances of winning the Republican nomination on a victory in the Oregon primary. But New York's governor, Thomas E. Dewey, the consensus choice of party leaders, out-campaigned Stassen. Dewey, reported *Time*, "hustled down the rain-swept Willamette Valley, over to the Pacific Coast and back to the central Oregon lumber country—pumping hands, signing autographs, ripping off ten speeches a day." The *New Yorker* beat Stassen by 10,000 votes and, overcoming other rivals at the G.O.P. convention, became the party's nominee.

Outsiders would later enter primaries with more success. In the 1952 Republican contest, Dwight D. Eisenhower demonstrated his popu-



Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), Gary Hart, and Jesse Jackson at the 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami. Author Theodore H. White called Hart, then George McGovern's aide, "the archetype of the new breed."

lar appeal by defeating the party leaders' favorite, Senator Robert A. Taft, in the New Hampshire, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Oregon primaries. In 1960 John F. Kennedy proved by beating Senator Hubert H. Humphrey in West Virginia that an Irish Catholic candidate could appeal to blue-collar Protestants. "Could you imagine me, having entered no primaries," Kennedy later said, "trying to tell the [party] leaders that being a Catholic was no handicap?"

Even in 1960, however, candidates could not win the nomination by racking up primary election victories. In that year, Kennedy collected, in 10 hard-won primaries, only half of the delegates he needed to win the nomination. Indeed, Kennedy, as political scientist Richard Neustadt has pointed out, needed to win over a relatively small number of "party barons [who] actually controlled and could deliver delegates at national conventions." But during the 1950s and 1960s, the United States began to change in ways that would soon make the party organizations and party conventions less important—giving way to the semi-independent efforts of individual candidates and to primary elections.

First, Americans overall became better educated. Only 15 percent of the electorate who voted for Eisenhower or Stevenson in 1952 had ever attended college—compared with 41 percent of the electorate who voted for Ronald Reagan or Walter Mondale in 1984. "More and more [Americans]," as Harvard's James Q. Wilson has observed, "are trained to think in terms of large issues, causes, and principles."

As education has increased so has awareness of public issues and with it, the amount of pressure that members of Congress and other politicians feel from their constituents. Indeed, the percentage of adults reporting that they had written letters to public officials on policy matters rose from 17 percent in 1964 to 28 percent in 1976. Thus, even as the percentage of eligible citizens who actually vote has declined—from 61.6 percent in 1952 to 53.3 percent in 1984—the number of Americans who belong to the electorate's active core has continued to climb.

St. George and the Dragon

Second, outside the two parties, new causes drew amateurs into full-time politics. First among these was the Civil Rights Movement, which began in 1955 with the Montgomery bus boycott and continued with the protest marches of the 1960s. Backed by an ad hoc coalition of liberal politicians, labor leaders, clergymen, and academics, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other black leaders challenged the moral foundations of the racial status quo in the South.

The Civil Rights Movement changed U.S. political life in two fundamental ways. First, it helped Lyndon Johnson push through Congress the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), and other legislation banning various devices that Southern states had used to disenfranchise blacks and the poor. Second, the movement provided a model for a

new wave of “public interest” groups that would press for their causes in the media, in state legislatures, and on Capitol Hill. For every liberal group, it seemed, a conservative one rose in opposition. Planned Parenthood, Inc. was soon confronted by the National Right to Life Committee; the Fellowship of Reconciliation encountered the Committee on the Present Danger; the National Council of Churches was matched by the Moral Majority.

Finally, television, almost overnight, dramatized elections and other political events. In 1950 only 3.9 million American households (or 9 percent of all households) owned TV sets. By 1960 46 million households (87 percent) were so equipped. Thus, in 1960, not only voters in Wisconsin and West Virginia but millions of voters everywhere saw film clips of Kennedy scoring his primary election victories. Television, as political scientist Sidney Wise has observed, “amplified the role of the primaries by surrounding each winner (or loser) with far more drama than headlines would provide. The raised hand, the cheering partisans and the cries of ‘on to Miami’ or ‘on to Chicago’ [could] easily obscure the fact that the winner faced only token opposition in a particular primary.”

Most Americans over 35 remember the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago as a chaotic affair, a grim televised melodrama of the Vietnam era, with violent off-stage street battles between antiwar demonstrators and Mayor Richard Daley’s angry police force. It was the first major party convention where newly mobilized groups of voters—blacks, feminists, young people—made up a substantial portion of the delegates. Still, as they saw it, they were “underrepresented.” Only five percent of the convention delegates were black, only 13 percent were women. “The insurgents had come to Chicago to bring an end to old politics,” as journalist Theodore White observed. “They were crusaders playing a new convention game called St. George and the Dragon; and the Dragon was Hubert Humphrey.”

Taking Affirmative Steps

Minnesota’s Senator Eugene McCarthy (the leading “peace candidate”) and his supporters criticized, among other things, the way the party chose its nominees. Indeed, before McCarthy entered the presidential race in December 1967, Democratic leaders in the various states had already chosen one-third of the party’s 3,057 convention delegates.

Although Vice President Hubert Humphrey emerged as the nominee, he did so after the party’s insurgents and regulars clashed over the rules and the delegates’ credentials. These quarrels—as well as dissension over race and the Vietnam War—divided the Democrats and helped put Richard Nixon in the White House. Afterward, Democratic leaders set up a commission to change the way the game was played. “We are in the process of invigorating our party with a massive injection of democracy,” wrote Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, the commis-

sion's first chairman. "The day of the bosses is over."

The McGovern Commission (which was later chaired by U.S. Representative Donald Fraser of Minnesota) revolutionized the nominating process. Reflecting the *zeitgeist* of the era, the commission instructed state Democratic parties to "overcome the effects of past discrimination" by taking "affirmative steps" to include young people, women, and minorities "in reasonable relationship to their presence in the population of the state" as delegates to future conventions. As a result, 40 percent of the delegates to the tumultuous 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami were women, 22 percent were under the age of 30, and 15 percent were black. The Republicans did not follow suit with similar guidelines. But at future G.O.P. conventions, the number of female (if not black) delegates increased rapidly too.

Later, the Democratic Party also barred states from using a "winner-take-all" system in allocating delegates after a primary contest. The Republicans did not require proportional delegate selection, but soon, in many states, both parties apportioned delegates according to the number of votes each party candidate received in each primary.

A New Political Game

The McGovern-Fraser Commission did not intend to increase the number of state primaries. But the new rules were so complicated when applied to caucuses and conventions that many state party leaders adopted the primary system as a lesser evil.

The number of primaries soared. Setting the pace, the Democrats held 15 state primaries in 1968, 22 in 1972, 30 in 1976, and 35 in 1980. Despite their skepticism toward reform, the G.O.P. leaders also increased the number of their state primaries. Most of the delegates elected in these primaries were legally bound to vote for a specified candidate on the first—and sometimes the second and third—ballot. Thus, ironically, just as the representation of women, blacks, and other groups increased, making the assembly appear, to a TV audience, more diverse, the delegates lost their powers of discretion.

The "reformed" nominating system, with all of its primaries, transformed the Democratic and Republican campaigns in many unanticipated ways. First, under the new system, candidates who won or fared well (relative to the press's expectations) in the early primaries also won the notoriety that the newspapers and television networks bestowed on the "front-runner."

In 1976, for example, the media began to focus attention on candidate Jimmy Carter after he won the Iowa caucus and, shortly thereafter, the nine-candidate New Hampshire primary (gaining just 30 percent of the vote). Between February 24 and April 27, *Time* and *Newsweek*, for example, gave 59 percent of their coverage of *all* Democratic candidates to the former governor from Georgia—even though Senator Henry

MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, 1964-1984

Since 1964, the percentage of convention delegates that candidates could win in the primaries has increased dramatically. But the eventual nominee (shown in bold) has often failed to win either a majority or a plurality of all votes cast in the primary elections. (See percentage figures after each candidate's name.)

Democrats

Republicans

1964

17 primaries/46% of delegates

17 primaries/46% of delegates

President Lyndon Johnson 17.7

Sen. Barry Goldwater (AZ) 38.2

Gov. Nelson Rockefeller (NY) 22.0
former Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge (MA) 6.5
Gov. William Scranton (PA) 4.1
Sen. Margaret Chase Smith (ME) 3.8
f. Gov. Harold Stassen (MN) 1.9

1968

15 primaries/40% of delegates

15 primaries/38% of delegates

Sen. Eugene McCarthy (MN) 38.7
Sen. Robert Kennedy (NY) 30.6*
V.P. Hubert Humphrey (MN) 2.2
Sen. George McGovern (SD) 0

Gov. Ronald Reagan (CA) 37.9
f. V.P. Richard Nixon (CA) 37.5
Gov. Nelson Rockefeller (NY) 3.7
f. Gov. Harold Stassen (MN) 0.7
Gov. George Romney (MI) 0.1

1972

22 primaries/65% of delegates

21 primaries/57% of delegates

Sen. Hubert Humphrey (MN) 25.8
Sen. George McGovern (SD) 25.3
Gov. George Wallace (AL) 23.5**
Sen. Edmund Muskie (ME) 11.5
f. Sen. Eugene McCarthy (MN) 3.5
Sen. Henry Jackson (WA) 3.2
Rep. Shirley Chisholm (NY) 2.7
f. Gov. Terry Sanford (NC) 2.1
Mayor John Lindsay (NY) 1.2
Mayor Sam Yorty (CA) 0.5
Rep. Wilbur Mills (AR) 0.2

President Richard Nixon 86.9
Sen. John Ashbrook (OH) 5.0
Rep. Paul McCloskey (CA) 2.1

Jackson (D.-Wash.) had gone on to win the Massachusetts and New York contests and by the end of April had cumulatively received more primary votes than Carter.

And by winning the media coverage, the front-runner also won an influx of money that was desperately needed to pay for the increasing costs of waging a state-to-state campaign. In 1952 Eisenhower and Taft *together* spent roughly \$2.5 million seeking the G.O.P nomination—a far cry, even after considering inflation, from the \$18 million that Walter

1976

30 primaries/76% of delegates

f. Gov. Jimmy Carter (GA) 38.8
 Gov. Edmund Brown, Jr. (CA) 15.3
 Gov. George Wallace (AL) 12.4
 Rep. Morris Udall (AZ) 10.0
 Sen. Henry Jackson (WA) 7.1
 Sen. Frank Church (ID) 5.2
 Sargent Shriver (MD) 1.9
 f. Sen. Fred Harris (OK) 1.5
 Ellen McCormack (NY) 1.5
 Sen. Birch Bayh (IN) 0.5
 Gov. Milton Shapp (PA) 0.5
 Sen. Hubert Humphrey (MN) 0.4

30 primaries/71% of delegates

President Gerald Ford 53.3
 f. Gov. Ronald Reagan (CA) 45.9

1980

35 primaries/72% of delegates

President Jimmy Carter 51.2
 Sen. Edward Kennedy (MA) 37.1
 Gov. Edmund Brown, Jr. (CA) 3.1
 Lyndon LaRouche (NY) 1.0

34 primaries/76% of delegates

f. Gov. Ronald Reagan (CA) 60.8
 f. Rep. George Bush (TX) 23.3
 Rep. John Anderson (IL) 12.4†
 Sen. Howard Baker (TN) 0.9
 Rep. Philip Crane (IL) 0.8
 f. Gov. John Connally (TX) 0.6
 f. Gov. Harold Stassen (MN) 0.2
 Sen. Robert Dole (KS) 0.1

1984

30 primaries/71% of delegates

President Ronald Reagan 98.6
 f. Gov. Harold Stassen (MN) 0.3

25 primaries/62% of delegates

f. V.P. Walter Mondale (MN) 37.8
 Sen. Gary Hart (CO) 36.1
 Rev. Jesse Jackson (IL) 18.2
 Sen. John Glenn (OH) 3.4
 f. Sen. George McGovern (SD) 1.9
 Lyndon LaRouche (VA) 0.7
 f. Gov. Reubin Askew (FL) 0.3
 Sen. Alan Cranston (CA) 0.3
 Sen. Ernest Hollings (SC) 0.2

*Assassinated after winning the California primary. Died June 6, 1968.

**In 1968, Democrat George Wallace ran on the American Independent Party ticket, and won 46 electoral votes; in 1972, he was incapacitated by a would-be assassin in May.

†In 1980, Anderson entered the G.O.P. primaries; he later ran on the National Unity Campaign ticket, but won no electoral votes.

Mondale spent to capture the party prize in 1984. After Gary Hart won the 1984 New Hampshire primary, his campaign treasurer started receiving \$100,000 a day in private donations.* Thus, the point of winning

*Under the Campaign Finance Act of 1974, candidates also received \$1 in federal money for every \$1 they collected in individual contributions of \$250 or less. To qualify for matching funds, candidates had to raise at least \$5,000 in individual contributions from each of 20 states. Under the act, individuals could contribute no more than \$1,000 to each candidate; corporate or labor political action committees could give no more than \$5,000.

the early primaries, candidates discovered, was not so much to win the delegates, but to attract resources needed to carry the campaign, with its enormous outlays for TV advertising, through the ordeal of the remaining primaries.

Thus, the marathon campaign was born. Candidates began frequenting the states that held the earliest primaries as much as two years before the event, hoping that repeated personal exposure to the voters would make the difference.

This new nominating system has shifted influence from party leaders, who once controlled slates of delegates, to the most ideologically fervent members of each party. Many of these true believers, much like the young peaceniks in "McGovern's Army" of 1972, take the candidate's message from door to door in the primary states; others give generously to direct-mail requests for campaign donations. "I think there are only two mail-donating segments of our society: the right-wing fringe and the left," fund-raiser Morris Dees once said. "The average American does not consider himself part of the political process other than going out to vote."

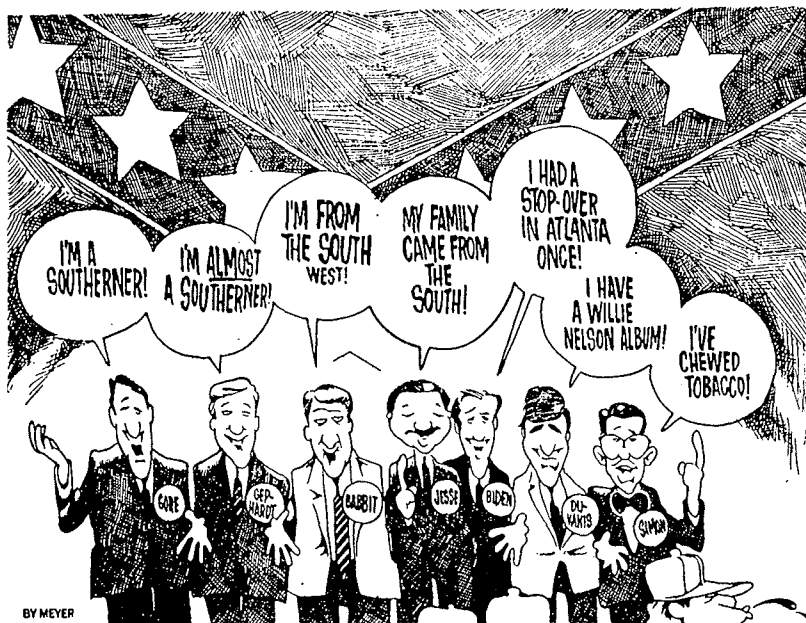
The new process has also favored the *former* governor or senator over the working politician. "The disproportionate rewards of early success," as political scientist William M. Luch has noted, "have produced a 'strategic environment' in which it apparently pays *not* to hold public office when running for president."

Consider 48 hours in the life of Bob Dole (R.-Kansas), Senate minority leader and presidential candidate: Last October 28—over three months before the first primary—Dole spent the morning and afternoon in Washington, busy with Senate affairs. Later that day, he flew to Houston for a "Firing Line" TV debate with five other Republican candidates. The senator then flew back to Washington after the debate, arriving in the capital at 3:00 A.M. He worked in the Capitol from 8:30 A.M. until early that afternoon, when he departed for California to attend a campaign fund raiser. Finally, Dole returned to Washington the following day for an early-morning budget conference. The senator's schedule explains, to some degree, why from 1976 to 1984, every major party nominee has been either a former office-holder, such as Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, or a president seeking re-election.

Jimmy Carter's Triumph

And finally, the reformed nominating system has favored the one-of-a-kind candidate. The primaries, as Berkeley's Austin Ranney has pointed out, express the voters' first preferences, but in a crowded field of candidates, they provide "no way of identifying, let alone aggregating, second and third choices so as to discover the candidate with the broadest—as opposed to the most intense—support."

In the 1972 Democratic primaries, for example, George McGovern,



"Super Tuesday" (March 8) has made both parties' candidates campaign hard in Dixie. But John Buckley, an aide to Jack Kemp, said: "If [George] Bush is in free fall after New Hampshire, the South won't save him."

by far the most liberal and the most antiwar candidate, collected some 4.05 million votes—more than any other *single* contender. Two more moderate candidates, senators Hubert Humphrey and Edmund Muskie, however, together collected 5.9 million votes, which were cast, presumably, by the party's more middle-of-the-road voters. By virtue of winning the most votes and thus the most delegates in the primaries, McGovern went on to win the nomination, on the first ballot, at the national convention in Miami. But it is arguable that in the 1972 general election campaign against Richard Nixon, either Humphrey or Muskie might have been the stronger Democratic candidate.

In 1976 candidate Jimmy Carter was out of office and, as a progressive Southerner, he was a one-of-a-kind candidate. These attributes, combined with his shrewd use of television, enabled the former governor of Georgia to defeat four well-established Democratic opponents: Birch Bayh, Henry Jackson, Hubert Humphrey, and Morris Udall. In the campaign, Carter presented himself, as newsman Christopher Lydon observed, as the ideal "television character," the "Bible-thumping Annapolis engineer" with a "wrinkled lovable mother [and] a 13-year-old daughter." The process Lydon says, made it possible for Carter to win the White House "without a block constituency, without an organizing

issue, without a friendly network of pols around the country." But as soon as Americans got bored with Carter's television persona, both his popularity and his ability to govern waned. In December 1977, columnist Russell Baker wrote that "if the Carter administration were a television show, it would have been cancelled months ago."

The Georgian's difficulties in the White House explain why the Democratic Party, in 1981, established a commission to reform the McGovern-Fraser reforms in a way that would bring party leaders back into the nominating game. The panel was chaired by North Carolina governor James Hunt.

The commission decided to reward the largest vote-getters by permitting states to deny any delegates at all to candidates who received less than 20 percent of the vote in primaries. And it ruled that at the 1984 convention, at least 14 percent of the seats would be filled by "superdelegates"—party leaders, governors, and members of Congress. "Our goal," said Hunt, was "to nominate a candidate who can win, and after winning, can govern effectively."

Unintended Consequences

The re-reforms, inevitably, did not please everyone. The 20-percent threshold along with the superdelegates, some Democrats argued, combined to make the nominating process markedly less open. Indeed, in 1984, Mondale won only 38 percent of the cumulative primary vote, but a majority of the delegates at the convention in San Francisco. The re-reforms, said candidate Jesse Jackson, were a "move away from primaries and one-man, one-vote," and a revival of "back-room politics."

Such complaints spurred the Democratic Party to form yet another panel—the Fairness Commission, headed by former South Carolina party chairman Donald Fowler—to redesign the nominating procedures for 1988. But, "the general consensus," as one commission adviser remarked, was that "the party has got to stop mucking around with the nominating process."

For 1988 the Democrats made only one big change—and it was not crafted by the Fairness Commission. Legislatures in 11 Southern and border states moved their Democratic and Republican primaries to March 8. By having most of the Old Confederacy choose its delegates on the same day, relatively early in the campaign season, the Southern Democrats hoped the party would be more likely to select a conservative, Sunbelt-oriented nominee. But "Super Tuesday," like other reforms, may produce unintended consequences. Since almost 20 percent of all Southern voters are black, the megaprimary may instead favor the most liberal, one-of-a-kind candidate in the race: Jesse Jackson.

Efforts to reform and re-reform the nominating process have not ended. Some Democrats and Republicans will certainly call for more changes after the 1988 election. If the candidates who win the early

primaries also win the nominations, party officials in Ohio, New Jersey, and California—who have held their primaries late in the season—may decide to move their primaries to March. This shift could create *several* large regional primaries which take place early in the election year.

Would a change in “the system” actually produce a better, or even a different nominee? Probably not.

Seven years ago I wrote an article for this magazine on the nominating process. The essay prompted a reply from George McGovern, the ill-starred 1972 Democratic nominee. “My own personal bias for many years,” McGovern wrote, “has been that political and economic forces plus personal factors—candidate skills, positioning on the issues, organization, political ‘timing’ and strategy—and the vagaries of the media have more to do with winning a presidential nomination than do the party procedures or reforms prevailing at any given time.”

In any case, party leaders who hope to revive the boss-dominated nominating process are not likely to succeed. The old patronage system crumbled long ago. The nominating system will retain its unruly character due to: the rapid growth in the number of well-educated, politically active citizens; the widespread reliance on television, which, for all its grave flaws, helps Americans to form their *own* opinions about each party’s politicians; and the presence of so many organized groups with antagonistic views.

Thus, one of the great challenges facing our nation today is to devise a system that both addresses the demands of competing special interests and furthers the national interest. That task will not be easy. The public insists that candidates be nominated for the presidency in a democratic fashion. But a more open system necessarily reduces the influence of professional politicians—even though the winning candidate will need their support when it comes time to govern.

The two major parties remain essential to the entire democratic process. They alone can reconcile the needs of democracy and those of leadership. “The party system of Government,” as Franklin D. Roosevelt once observed, “is one of the greatest methods of unification and of teaching people to think in common terms.”

THE ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE, 1988

This year's presidential candidates are competing, variously, for 4,160 Democratic or 2,277 G.O.P. convention delegates. The far-right column shows the total numbers of delegates at stake on each caucus/primary election day. The Democratic figures exclude some "superdelegates" (governors, congressmen). Several low-profile G.O.P. state conventions and Democratic caucuses do not appear.

February 8	Democratic & Republican caucuses in Iowa	58D/37R
February 16	D. & R. primaries in N.H.	22D/23R
February 23	R. caucus in Minn. , R. primary in S.D.	49R
February 28	D. caucus in Maine	27D
March 5	D. caucus in Wyo. , R. primary in S.C.	18D/37R
March 8	Super Tuesday: D. & R. primaries in Ala., Ark., Fla., Ga., Ky., La., Md., Mass., Miss., Mo., N.C., Okla., R.I., Tenn., Texas; D. caucuses in Hawaii, Idaho, Nev., Wash.; D. primary in Va.	1449D/712R
March 10	D. caucus in Alaska	17D
March 12	D. caucuses in S.C., S.D.	67D
March 13	D. caucus in N.D.	20D
March 15	D. & R. primaries in Ill.	188D/92R
March 19	D. caucus in Kansas	43D
March 22	D. primary for Democrats Abroad	9D
March 26	D. caucus in Mich.	151D
March 29	D. & R. primaries in Conn.	59D/35R
April 4	D. & R. caucuses in Colo.	51D/36R
April 5	D. & R. primaries in Wis.	88D/47R
April 16	D. caucus in Ariz.	40D
April 18	D. caucus in Del.	19D
April 19	D. & R. primaries in N.Y. , D. caucus in Vt.	294D/136R
April 25	D. caucus in Utah	27D
April 26	D. & R. primaries in Pa.	193D/96R
May 3	D. & R. primaries in D.C., Ind., Ohio	282D/153R
May 10	D. & R. primaries in Nebr., W. Va.	72D/53R
May 17	D. & R. primaries in Oregon	51D/32R
May 24	R. primary in Idaho	22R
June 7	D. & R. primaries in Calif., Mont., N.J., N.M.	507D/285R
June 14	R. primary in N.D.	16R
July 18-21	Democratic National Convention in Atlanta	
August 15-18	Republican National Convention in New Orleans	
November 8	Election Day	

BACKGROUND BOOKS

CHOOSING AMERICA'S PRESIDENTS

At the turn of the century, Chicago newspaperman Finley Peter Dunne created "Mister Dooley," a fictional Irish bartender who voiced the common man's views. "Politics ain't beanbag," Dooley once said. "Tis a man's game; an' women, childher, an' pro-hyhibitionists'd do well to keep out iv it."

If Mr. Dooley were tending bar today, writes Martin Schram in **The Great American Video Game** (Morrow, 1987), he might say that "Politics is video games. 'Tis an actor's game—an imagemark'r's an' illusionist's game—an' women, childher, an' politicians'd do well to keep out iv it."

Television had become so important to politics that by 1984, Schram, a *Washington Post* reporter, decided to cover the election campaign by watching news reports and the candidates' ads on TV. Among other things, Schram concluded that the local television news was more influential than the national network programs in presidential primary campaigns.

During the weeks prior to the crucial New Hampshire primary, some 432,000 adults living in the Boston TV market (which encompasses southern New Hampshire) watched one of the local hour-long news shows; only 312,000 stayed tuned to the half-hour NBC news program that followed. And whereas the network news stories on the candidates usually lasted between 80 seconds and two minutes, the local TV reports often ran twice that long.

Schram's chronicle is the latest of the books on TV and presidential campaigns. Television first provided (relatively) comprehensive campaign coverage during the election of 1952. As Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang report in **Politics and Television** (Quadrangle, 1968), some commentators thought that TV coverage of the 1952 Democratic and

Republican national conventions would transform the conventions into large, New England-style town meetings, enabling viewers, as one news executive put it, "to vote for men and principles, and not for party labels."

In **Television and Presidential Politics** (Christopher, 1972), Robert E. Gilbert recalls some of TV's most significant early moments. During the 1960 campaign, between 65 and 70 million Americans watched each of the four debates between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Television, it seemed, changed not only what Americans did in their living rooms, but how they practiced politics in their communities. Gilbert quotes author James Michener, then chairman of the Bucks County (Pa.) Democratic Party: "Immediately after the debate we received funds from heaven knows where to open four additional offices . . . We got phone calls volunteering services. We got automobiles and posters. We received checks through the mail and a steady stream of visitors."

As television changed the business of politics, politics changed the business of television. In **The People Machine** (Harper, 1968), journalist Robert McNeil says that by 1964, TV executives discovered that the network that attracted the most viewers during the party conventions usually gained the Number One audience ratings over the next four years. One unnamed CBS reporter admitted that "CBS went to the [1964 Republican] San Francisco convention with the desire to beat NBC, not to cover the convention in [the] most thoughtful and original way."

Before long, some politicians began to criticize the media's role. Conservatives suspected that television and newspaper reporters were not fair-minded but biased in favor of liberal causes and candi-

dates. After being elected, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew charged that media stars were "nattering nabobs of negativism" who were out of touch with America's "silent majority." But C. Richard Hofstetter's **Bias In the News** (Ohio State Univ., 1976), a sober study of the 1972 campaign, found that ABC, CBS, and NBC did not slant their coverage to favor the Democratic nominee, George McGovern, over the G.O.P. incumbent, Richard Nixon.

But journalism is "horse racist," according to Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, authors of **Over the Wire and On TV** (Russell Sage, 1983). Robinson and Sheehan arrived at this and other conclusions after examining more than 5,000 news stories on the 1980 presidential campaign, which had been produced by CBS and United Press International. Fully two-thirds of the stories, they say, focused not on substantive issues but on the "horse race"—that is, which candidates were ahead and which were behind. "Networks and wires," the authors observe, "won't make anybody an expert on anything except how a politician is doing in the polls."

While some scholars have pondered "bias," others have wondered whether TV really informs viewers at all. Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure complained in **The Unseeing Eye** (Putnam's, 1976) that TV news reports of the 1972 campaign "almost entirely avoid[ed] discussion of the candidates' qualifications."

In **The Main Source** (Sage, 1986), John P. Robinson and Mark R. Levy argue that television is simply a poor medium for conveying *information*. The typical TV news program, the authors point out, crams 20 rapid-fire stories into 22 minutes of commercial-interrupted air time. Television watchers sometimes cannot even tell when one news report ends and the next begins. Nor can they

go back and review news they missed or did not understand.

"For many viewers, watching the news may produce an experience of having been informed," say Robinson and Levy, "But it is a false sense of knowledge, for it is based only on a vaguely understood jumble of visual and auditory stimuli that leave few traces in long-term memory."

Whatever its effect on the voters, television has clearly transformed the way the candidates approach presidential campaigns. **Nominating A President** (Praeger, 1980), edited by John Foley, Dennis A. Britton, and Eugene B. Everett, Jr., presents a series of frank round table talks held at Harvard during the 1980 campaign. One speaker, consultant John P. Marttila, claims that most candidates now spend between 65 and 70 percent of their money on TV, radio, and newspaper advertising. "The real foundations of modern campaigning," he says, "are survey research and television." He adds that "most candidates around the country circumvent the local party organization."

Hence, the blossoming of television, combined with the proliferation of state primaries, Nelson Polsby observes in **The Consequences of Party Reform** (Oxford, 1983), has given rise to a new group of political operatives, including "fund-raisers by mail and by rock concert, media buyers, advertising experts, public relations specialists, poll analysts, television spot producers . . ."

Newspapers still set the agenda in presidential campaigns despite television's hold on the candidates.

In **Elections American Style** (Brookings, 1987), edited by A. James Reichley, Albert R. Hunt of the *Wall Street Journal* points out that in 1984 newspapermen initiated the major stories, such as Walter Mondale's links to special interest groups, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson's ties to black extremists: "Once the agenda was on the table, tele-

vision dominated the dialogue.”

And a skilled magazine reporter, Hunt might have added, also introduced the “human interest” approach (which so many TV folk employ today) to covering campaigns. When Theodore White sat down to write **The Making of the President, 1960** (Atheneum, 1961), he hoped that there might be “some permanent value in the effort of a contemporary reporter to catch the mood and the strains, the weariness, elation and uncertainties of the men who sought to lead America.” White’s formula proved so popular that he produced *Making of the President* sequels on the 1964, 1968, and 1972 elections.

Equally important, White’s book served as a model for other narratives. In **The Boys On the Bus** (Random, 1972), which covers the 1972 campaign, Timothy Crouse describes the pack of reporters who “fed off the same pool report, the same daily [press] handout.” After a while, Crouse says, the reporters “began to believe the same rumors, subscribe to the same theories, and write the same stories.”

Among those wayfarers whom Crouse encounters is Theodore White, who had soured on up-close journalism. White tells Crouse: “We’re all sitting there watching [Democratic nominee George McGovern] work on his acceptance speech, poor bastard . . . and all of us are observing him, taking notes like mad, getting all the little details. Which I think I invented as a method of reporting and which I now sincerely regret. If you write about this, say that I sincerely regret it.”

Other journalists’ after-action reports

include Martin Schram’s **Running for President, 1976** (Stein & Day, 1977); Jeff Greenfield’s **The Real Campaign** (Summit, 1982), about the 1980 race; and two books on the 1984 Mondale-Reagan contest, **Wake Us When It’s Over** (Macmillan, 1985) by Jack Germond and Jules Witcover; and William A. Henry III’s bright **Visions of America** (Atlantic Monthly, 1985). All of these post-mortems examine the media’s role. Germond and Witcover suggest that had Reagan, the “Great Communicator,” not been able to manipulate the media, the better-informed Mondale could have won on the issues—a claim which, many of the book’s critics have argued, is probably excessive.

Outstanding scholarly long-term accounts include Eugene H. Roseboom’s concise **History of Presidential Elections** (Macmillan, 1957); a four-volume **History of American Presidential Elections** (McGraw-Hill, 1971), edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; and **Congressional Quarterly’s** detailed **Guide to U.S. Elections**.

Happily, there is also one respectable work—Paul F. Boller, Jr.’s anecdotal **Presidential Campaigns** (Oxford, 1984)—which takes a light-hearted approach. During the 1972 campaign, Democratic vice presidential nominee Sargent Shriver, a Kennedy in-law, liked to tell audiences how he tried to get his children to study harder, noting, “When Abraham Lincoln was your age, he walked twelve miles back and forth to school every day.” “That’s nothing,” Shriver reported one of his children as saying, “When Uncle Jack was your age, he was President of the United States.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Lawrence Lichty, a former Wilson Center Fellow and now professor of radio/television/film at Northwestern University, suggested many of the titles that appear in this essay.*