

PRESS & TELEVISION

*The Media
Strike Out*

"The Myth of the Media's Political Power" by Jeff Greenfield, in *Channels of Communications* (June-July 1982), P.O. Box 2001, Mahopac, N.Y. 10541.

The election of telegenic former actor Ronald Reagan in 1980 seemed to many observers to confirm the power of television in politics. Actually, says Greenfield, a commentator for CBS News, the 1980 election proved the opposite.

All of Ted Kennedy's charisma could not overcome his failure to provide voters with an appealing political program. The "irresistible" momentum (the "Big Mo") proclaimed by news pundits during George Bush's early primary victories came to naught. President Jimmy Carter's attempt to use his office to dominate the news backfired. The more media attention the President commanded, Greenfield contends, the more impatient the public became with his policies and personal attacks on Reagan.

Reagan, on the other hand, made countless supposedly fatal "media gaffes" (he replied "Who?" to a question on the *Today* show about French President Giscard d'Estaing), but confounded the media "experts" and pollsters by winning handily.

The untold story of the 1980 campaign, Greenfield says, is the media's failure to understand the limited electoral appeal of "political stagecraft." Reporters focused on the frivolous aspects of electioneering—"the bands, the balloons"—and downplayed political issues. "Covering Presidential campaigns, then, was like covering a marketing campaign: Don't report speeches in great detail; report the political strategy behind the speech," writes Greenfield. But the Republicans proved that effective organization (reflected in an eight-to-one fund-raising lead) and candidates' positions mean more to the voters than "a raised eyebrow by Walter Cronkite."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*False Credit for
Human Rights*

"Human Rights and Human Dignity: An Analytic Critique of Non-Western Conceptions of Human Rights" by Jack Donnelly, in *The American Political Science Review* (June 1982), 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Non-Western political leaders and scholars often claim that their cultures have long records of respect for human rights. Actually, human rights are "an artifact of modern Western civilization," writes Donnelly, a political scientist at Holy Cross College. Traditional non-Western "human rights" are something else entirely.