

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."

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*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.

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Muslim scholars, for example, cite the Koran to show that Islam recognizes 14 distinct human rights. But the Islamic "right of free expression" is actually a *duty* to speak the truth; the "right" to life, a *duty* not to kill. Such injunctions do help ensure human dignity, which Donnelly sees as the aim of human rights. But unlike those in the West, these "rights" carry no guarantees. The Koran's command that a ruler establish justice in his land does not give his people a right to justice.

Some non-Western societies have acknowledged certain rights, but without granting them universally. In traditional Hindu India, for example, rights were distributed according to caste; in Africa, according to "communal membership, family, status, or achievement."

The modern Western concept of human rights assumes the existence of a large state, against which the individual must be protected, observes Donnelly. By contrast, traditional non-Western ideas of human rights have centered on "the small community based on groupings of extended families," where a network of social support serves the same protective function as institutionalized Western human rights.

When Western philosophers began discussing human rights in the 17th century, the modern state was just taking shape. According to Donnelly, needs for human rights in the Third World today are "essentially the same . . . as they were two or three centuries ago in England and France." But he worries that some governments may reject the notion of human rights out of misplaced resistance to Western "cultural imperialism." Though a product of advancing Western culture, Donnelly argues, all human rights necessarily belong to all human beings. And non-Western governments that recognize the rights to liberty and property will, he predicts, win popular support and hasten economic development.

The Prophet of Liberation

"On Herbert Marcuse and the Concept of Psychological Freedom" by Myriam Miedzian Malinovich, in *Social Research* (Spring 1982), 66 West 12th St., New York, N.Y. 10011.

The 1960s student generation hailed American Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) as an apostle of sexual liberation. But according to Malinovich, a CUNY philosopher, Marcuse's theories were not what they seemed.

Like all Marxists of the decade, Marcuse faced a knotty intellectual problem: Marx's indictment of capitalism for exploiting labor seemed irrelevant in view of the rising prosperity of most American workers. In such books as *Eros and Civilization* (1966), Marcuse charged that capitalism had merely satisfied "false" materialistic needs. To show how capitalism failed to meet man's "true" psychological needs, he turned to Sigmund Freud's notion that "civilization is built upon the renunciation of instinctual gratification." Capitalism, Marcuse argued,