

# spectra

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## COMMUNICATION AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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*Spectra*, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. *Spectra* is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

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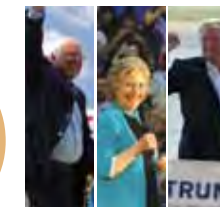
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## spectra?

### DID YOU KNOW

Nearly 100,000 new Communication graduates may be eligible to vote in this year's presidential election. And, college-educated young people are much more likely to vote than their non-college educated peers. Communication graduates can make a difference!



# “Can We Talk?”

By Christina S. Beck, Ph.D.



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How can we encourage thoughtful, respectful, and compassionate participation in online exchanges, especially regarding politics, politicians and their families, serious social problems, and difficult situations?

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On the morning after Chelsea Clinton introduced her mother at the Democratic National Convention, my daughter, Brittany, posted a generous message on Facebook:

Watching the Democratic National Convention and seeing Chelsea Clinton speak about her mom is such a great reminder to all of us with strong moms, who always encourage us to do better, run after our dreams, and be a light in the world, to thank them for the amazing way they raised us and demonstrated through their actions that we could be anything we wanted to be! They grew up in a time when women were limited, but fought hard for equality through their actions and pursuits, and because of their work, we so often take for granted the rights they won for us...

Of course, I immediately “liked” Brittany’s post, but then one of her Facebook friends commented “your mom, not hers,” and another replied that “I’d vote for your mom, but not crooked Hillary.” Although I am honored to serve as NCA President, I have no intentions of ever launching a career in politics, much less running for President of the United States. For one thing, I love my current job. For another, I can’t imagine subjecting my family to the harsh tones, rude exchanges, and negativity that candidates and their families have encountered and, in some cases, initiated, especially during the most recent presidential election.

The late Joan Rivers famously uttered whatever popped into her mind without censor—often razor-sharp

critiques, accompanied by her signature question, “Can we talk?” A talented comedian, Rivers’ rants were filled with snide comments about public figures. Audiences roared with laughter at Rivers’ willingness to boldly trash a queen’s dress as “tacky” or “frumpy,” for example—something that a polite person might think but never come out and say... unless on the campaign trail or through social media.

Obviously, jabs during campaign speeches and insults in political ads aren’t new, and we certainly should welcome vigorous debate about important issues and the viability of ideas. However, the prevalent tenor of some candidate attacks, coupled with just plain mean social media interactions among “Facebook friends,” “Twitter followers,” etc., does not seem productive. In fact, the culture of social media has become increasingly toxic for those who seek (or stumble into) the glare of public spotlights. Unlike Rivers’ stand-up routines, such exchanges don’t strike me as funny.

This past summer has been a sad season of online divisiveness and finger-pointing, particularly in response to politicians and tragic events... “How could someone be ignorant enough to vote for Trump?” “Do we really want to spend four years listening to Hillary’s laugh?” Fierce online chatter didn’t stop with politicians, though, as social media users also launched into irate vents about sorrowful stories in the news... “Where were the parents when that kid climbed through the fence” at the Cincinnati Zoo? “[W]e need to lock up that irresponsible

mom and take away her kids.” “How could someone seriously not know about alligators in Florida?”

As a mom, I’ve cringed at the swift rush to self-righteous judgment about the tragedies involving children, remembering the times that I’ve been momentarily distracted or struggled to entertain a bored toddler. But for the grace of God, I could have been the mom at the Cincinnati Zoo or the Grand Floridian. In a blink of an eye, one misstep could have launched me into a social media firestorm, facing an onslaught of vicious attacks on me, as a parent and a person, by others who don’t know me at all. The parents in Cincinnati and Orlando were on fun summer outings with their respective children, never envisioning how their trips would end or that their situations would become fodder for millions who felt compelled to contribute to the public shaming on Facebook.

Unlike those otherwise private citizens, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump did choose to run for office, become public figures, and open themselves and their families to scrutiny by the media, fellow candidates, and the general public. When I read reactions to my daughter’s Facebook post, my heart ached for Chelsea Clinton. No, she’s not likely to read the comments on my daughter’s Facebook page, but she’s certainly seen similar ones—and worse—about her mom... Petty posts about Hillary Clinton’s laugh or attire or bathroom breaks during a debate... Nasty jabs regarding her integrity or marriage. The Trump children also likely see at least some of the plethora of personal attacks on their dad and his wife.

Following Melania Trump’s speech at the Republican National Convention, posts flooded social media, charging that she had plagiarized parts of her speech. Fair enough. Yet, I was stunned to read comments such as “We all know that she’s stupid.” Do we? Why did this post need to sink the conversation from a legitimate concern about an ethical issue to a personal attack on the level of intelligence of the candidate’s wife? *Can* we talk, not in ways that tear others down, but in ways that move all of us forward?

*How* we talk (in general, but particularly about the political process) matters. The current climate could discourage good candidates from putting themselves and their families in the line of online fire, and it distracts us from useful conversations about important issues. Moreover, such discourse sets a dangerous precedent about how to engage in civic discussions for those who are just beginning to interact about candidates and policies. To borrow from a recent Hillary Clinton ad, “Our children are watching. What example will we set for them?”

As Communication scholars, how can we encourage thoughtful, respectful, and compassionate participation in online exchanges, especially regarding politics, politicians and their families, serious social problems, and difficult situations? How can our discipline do more to foster civility and dignity and to encourage listening and collaboratively considering alternate perspectives, especially when we *can* talk so easily through social media? ■

# Spotlight

## DATA ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE

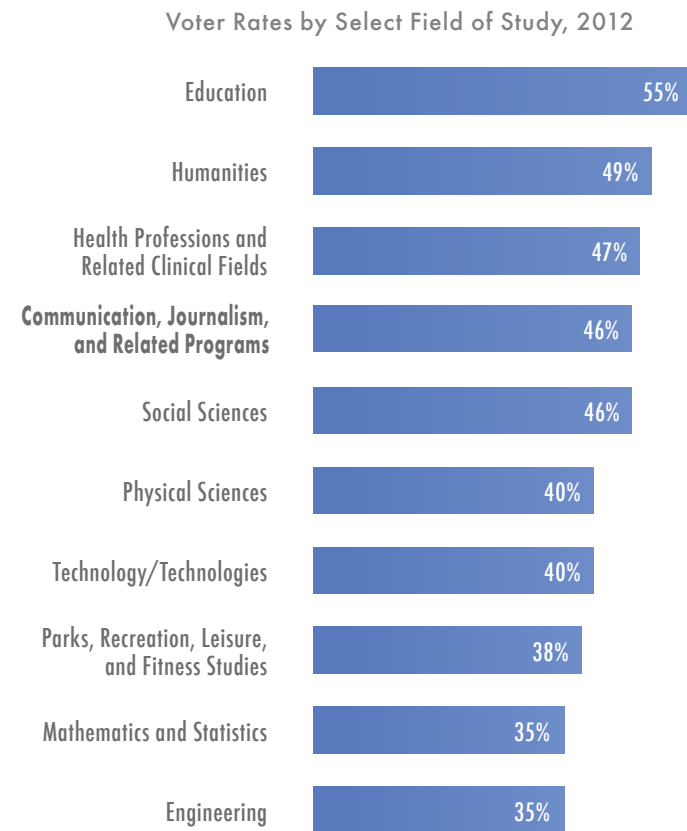
### Communication Students More Likely to Vote than Students in STEM Majors

In May 2016, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) released an analysis of college students' voting patterns. The analysis was based on the 2012 voting records of 7.4 million students at 783 institutions, including 544 four-year and 229 two-year institutions.

The findings of this study show an overall average voter turnout of 45 percent among all students. This low rate of voter turnout is not new. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the voting rate among 18- to 24-year-olds has been lower than among all other age groups in each presidential election since 1962. The Census Bureau finds that, on average, fewer than half of eligible young adult voters will vote in a presidential election.

The NSLVE analysis shows that students in STEM-related fields were less likely to vote than their peers in education, the humanities, and the social sciences. Communication student voter rates were also higher than the overall average, at 46 percent. The figure to the right provides a breakdown of the majors with the highest and lowest voter turnout.

In 2012, there were no differences between voting rates at private and public institutions; both types of institutions reported student voter rates of 47 percent. Student voter turnout was slightly higher at four-year institutions (48 percent) than at two-year institutions (45 percent).



Source: "College Student Voting Rates Vary by Region, Field of Study." (2016). Institute for Democracy & Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/NSLVE-VotingByMajor.pdf>.

## IN OUR JOURNALS

**Claartje L. Ter Hoeven, Ward van Zoonen, and Kathryn L. Fonner, "The Practical Paradox of Technology: The Influence of Communication Technology Use on Employee Burnout and Engagement," *Communication Monographs* 83 (2016): 239-263.**

In this article, Ter Hoeven, van Zoonen, and Fonner explore the benefits and consequences of communication technology use (CTU) in the workplace. Combining insights from organizational paradoxes and the job demands-resources model, the authors developed a framework for examining the relationship between CTU and employee well-being, defined by the authors as work engagement and burnout. Ter Hoeven, van Zoonen, and Fonner found that CTU both increases well-being by improving employees' accessibility and efficiency, and also decreases well-being because it causes interruptions and unpredictability. The authors underscore the importance of

investigating CTU resources and demands in an effort to fully understand the relationship between CTU and employee well-being, and they highlight the importance of considering both the advantages and disadvantages of CTU to successfully implement new communication technologies and flexible work designs.

**Patric R. Spence, Deborah D. Sellnow-Richmond, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Kenneth A. Lachlan, "Social Media and Corporate Reputation During Crisis: The Viability of Video-Sharing Websites for Providing Counter-Messages to Traditional Broadcast News," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 44 (2016): 199-215.**

This article examines the use of social media to combat the negative effects of prior news messaging about lean finely textured beef

## PUBLIC PRESENCE

### NCA Members Travel to Beijing for International Conference



The Communication, Media, and Governance in the Age of Globalization conference took place June 17–19 in Beijing, China. Co-sponsored by NCA and the Communication University of China, the conference addressed broad issues in communication, including the role of China and the United States in discussions of democracy, nationalism, citizenship, human rights, environmental priorities, and public health. The conference explored these issues in panel sessions, workshops, graduate student panel sessions, and poster sessions.

Several NCA members attended the conference. NCA First Vice President Stephen Hartnett, NCA Director of Academic and

Professional Affairs Trevor Parry-Giles, and NCA member Qingwen Dong of the University of the Pacific served as keynote speakers during the conference.

Dong is Co-Chair of the NCA Fostering International Collaborations in the Age of Globalization Task Force. The task force, appointed by Hartnett as part of his Presidential Initiative, supports NCA members as they pursue international collaborations in research, teaching, and service. Task force members met at the conference, conducted a session, planned future programs, and served as chairs and respondents on various panels.

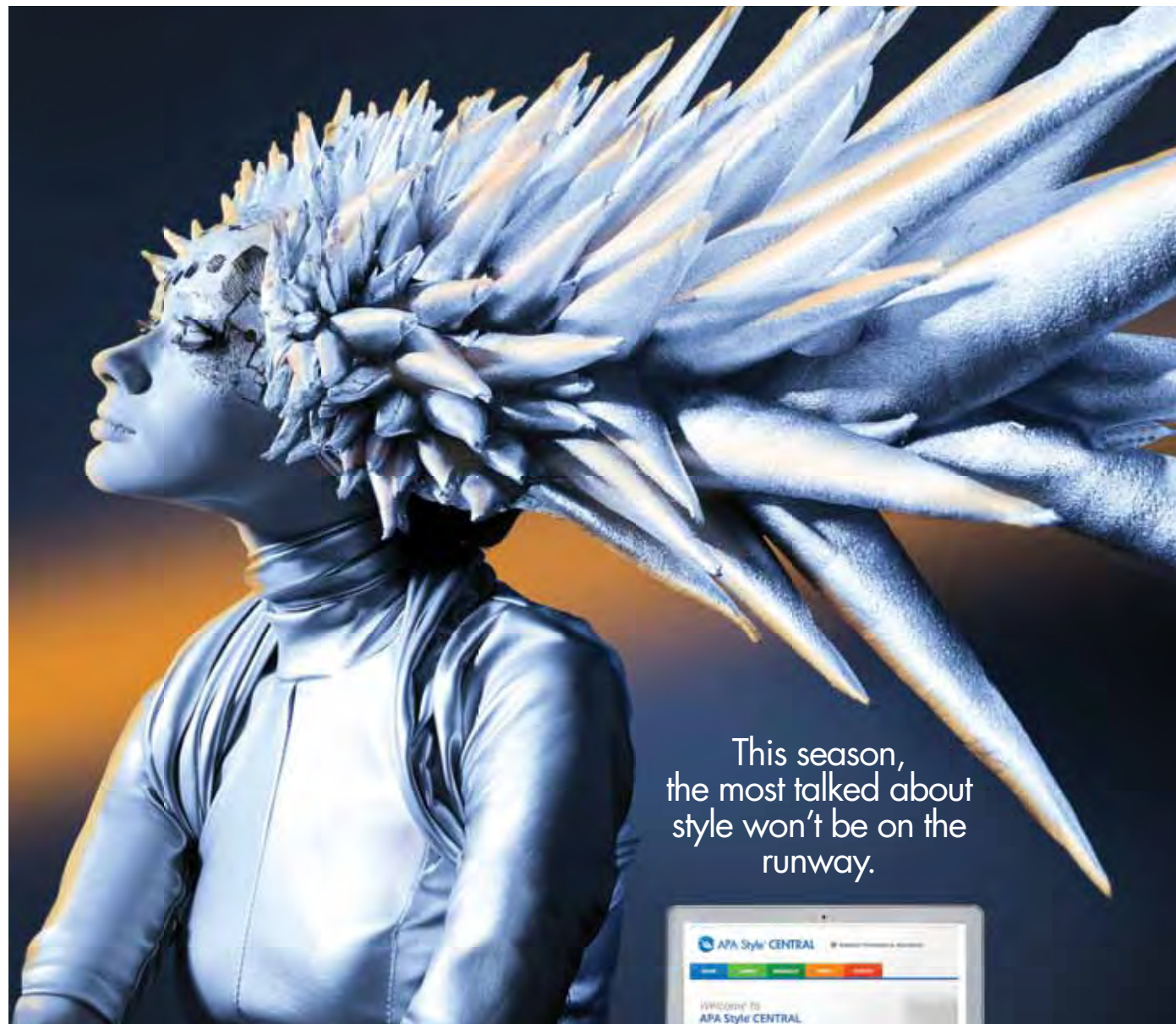
manufacturers. Specifically, the authors were interested in social media sites that allowed for video-sharing. Study participants reported their perceptions of threat severity, susceptibility, and intention to avoid lean finely textured beef, as well as their perceptions of organizational trust and manufacturer reputation. Findings support the impact of exemplification on risk messages and also offer support for the notion that message order is important. Findings also indicate that third-party messages that are based in logic may be helpful in countering overreactions to risk messages that are driven by exemplification; however, the timing of those messages is important.

**Pauline Hope Cheong, Robert Shuter, and Tara Suwinyattichaiorn, "Managing Student Digital Distractions and Hyperconnectivity: Communication Strategies and**

**Challenges for Professorial Authority," *Communication Education* 65 (2016): 272-289.**

Cheong, Shuter, and Suwinyattichaiorn investigate the communication practices that constitute professorial authority to manage students' digital distractions in classrooms. The authors interviewed professors about the communication strategies they employ to demonstrate their professorial authority. These strategies include enactment of codified rules, strategic redirection, discursive sanctions, and deflection. Findings highlight various challenges that instructors face when attempting to manage students' digital distractions. The article provides a discussion of contemporary pedagogical authority in a period when digital hyperconnectivity presents new opportunities for classroom adaption, as well as new classroom challenges.





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## AN INTRODUCTION



# COMMUNICATION AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

One thing is for certain: This presidential campaign season hasn't been boring. But that isn't necessarily a good thing. A quick Google search on "presidential campaign rhetoric" brings up nearly 4 million results, many of them including such words as "ugly," "appalling," "nasty," and "shocking." Indeed, the harshness of the campaign's rhetoric could be the subject of its own issue of *Spectra*.

In this special issue of the magazine, however, authors delve differently into the race for the U.S. presidency to address a wide variety of communication-related topics. In so doing, they describe some of the distinct aspects of the 2016 campaign (including its seemingly endless harshness), and relate the current political climate to broader societal issues and to what this year's campaign may mean for future elections.

In her opening article, Mary Stuckey argues that most of the instability characterizing the presidential primaries was the result of Republican Party upheaval, noting that in spite of the formidable challenge posed by Senator Bernie Sanders, "Hillary Clinton's pragmatic campaign marched steadily toward the nomination of the more institutionally robust Democratic Party." Donald Trump, on the other hand, was able to capitalize on what Stuckey characterizes as the Republican Party's instability. Candidates in both parties, she says, tapped into a perceived sense of voter anger (promoted eagerly by the media) to secure their support.

Interestingly, emerging from the primary process, both of the major party candidates are confronting historically low "likability" ratings, as reported in many public opinion polls. In her provocative article, Karrin Vasby Anderson explores the impact of gender on these ratings. "An assessment of Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's likability challenges," she writes, "reveals

gendered portrayals of candidate favorability and the mainstreaming of pornified political discourses."

Gender is certainly not the only difference-maker in this year's election. "This campaign cycle showcases the convergence of two major variables: economic decline and White fragility," writes Lisa Corrigan. Corrigan discusses how Trump capitalized on "White fragility to shape his version of White populism" to win the Republican Party's nomination, and how Clinton's ability to embrace plurality while avoiding "divisive race-talk" helped propel her to the top of the Democratic ticket.

All of these issues played out in unscripted ways both on the campaign trail and during what are perhaps the most communicative of all elements of national elections—the presidential debates. With tens of millions of viewers tuning into televised presidential debates, authors Benjamin R. Warner and Mitchell S. McKinney write that "voter expectations now make the risk of refusing to debate one's opponent too great for any candidate." The authors trace the history and impact of the debates, exploring the question of the extent to which televised debates matter in terms of election outcomes.

Finally, Trevor Parry-Giles discusses the interplay between pop culture and the presidency. "From fine art to performing arts, across an array of media," he writes, "the intermingling of pop culture and electoral politics is thorough in contemporary political culture." From Tina Fey, to Harrison Ford, to Larry David, prominent pop culture personalities serve "the valuable and centrally important role of questioning and challenging, of asking voters to see politics and politicians differently."

With the election just days away, we hope you enjoy the insights shared in this special issue of *Spectra*. And, we look forward to seeing you in Philadelphia for NCA's Annual Convention, where the presidential election results are sure to be a prominent subject of discussion. ■



# ⚡ SNAPSHOTS FROM THE

# CAMPAIGN TRAIL



**JULY 2016:** President Obama and Hillary Clinton, Charlotte, North Carolina.



**JULY 2016:** Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine one day after announcing Tim Kaine's Democratic vice presidential candidacy, Miami, Florida.

**JUNE 2016:** Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren, Cincinnati, Ohio.



**MAY 2016:** Hillary Clinton, Louisville, Kentucky.



**MARCH 2016:** Bernie Sanders, Saint Charles, Missouri.

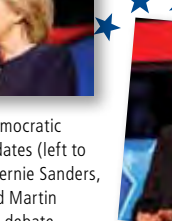
**JANUARY 2016:** Hillary Clinton addresses Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Los Angeles, California.



**DECEMBER 2015:** Bernie Sanders, Mount Vernon, Iowa.



**OCTOBER 2015:** Democratic presidential candidates (left to right) Jim Webb, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Martin O'Malley at a CNN debate, Las Vegas, Nevada.



**JULY 2016:** Donald Trump, Manhattan, New York.



**JULY 2016:** Donald Trump introducing Mike Pence as the Republican vice presidential candidate, Manhattan, New York.

**JUNE 2016:** Donald Trump, Sacramento, California.



**MAY 2016:** Donald Trump, Anaheim, California.



**MARCH 2016:** Ted Cruz, Madison, Wisconsin.



**DECEMBER 2015:** Donald Trump, Des Moines, Iowa.



**DECEMBER 2015:** Republican presidential candidates (left to right) John Kasich, Carly Fiorina, Marco Rubio, Ben Carson, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and Jeb Bush at a CNN debate, Las Vegas, Nevada.





# *Stability and Change in the Rhetoric of the 2016 Presidential Primaries*

By Mary E. Stuckey, Ph.D.

**B**ecause they involve political institutions (parties) and relatively stable political processes (primaries, conventions), presidential campaigns are reasonably predictable. They rely, in general, on a reform motif promising incremental change rather than a revolution frame which promises radical change. So in some ways, this primary campaign season was fairly predictable and aligned nicely with our understanding of how campaigns are supposed to work. In other ways, it was a series of startling anomalies and seemed unhinged from historical precedent. The primaries displayed both stability and unpredictability. These elements, however, were not equally distributed across party lines: Donald Trump's guerilla campaign succeeded in seizing the nomination from an institutionally troubled Republican Party, while despite the surprising resilience of Bernie Sanders's insurgency, Hillary Clinton's pragmatic campaign marched steadily toward the nomination of the more institutionally robust Democratic Party.

The fractured nature of the Republicans and the relative strength of the Democratic machinery are important elements undergirding the predictions of a Clinton victory in November. This election, however, might well be the last manifestation of these parties as we know them, and they foreshadow important factors for the future.

## **STABILITY: THE REFORM FRAME AND THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY**

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders did better than any other so-called insurgent contender in history, amassing 1,893 total delegates, raising more than \$200 million, and providing ample evidence that not all Democrats are content with incremental and pragmatic politics. But even with this unprecedented success, his campaign also provides evidence for the overall institutional stability of the Democratic Party. While Sanders is, arguably, an outsider in Democratic politics, he is best understood as a political insider. He served as





Vermont's sole member of Congress for 16 years before becoming one of its senators in 2012. In many ways, his campaign exemplified the ways in which those with considerable local experience succeed and stumble when they make their first appearance on a national stage.

His campaign succeeded in generating considerable excitement, both for him personally and for a rather vague vision of a more economically equitable nation. But as an essay in the May 2016 *Mother Jones* pointed out, not even his supporters agreed with most of his specific policy proposals. His candidacy failed because he did not appeal to the long-standing Democratic coalition. In particular, his inability to win in large, diverse states, and his lack of support among people of color meant that he could not win the nomination.

Sanders channeled a kind of populism, but it was, as *Fortune* noted in March, a very white kind of populism that did not appeal to minorities. *Slate* correspondent Jamelle Bouie consistently pointed out that Sanders conveyed a dated understanding of the Democratic Party and of the working class that has been important to it. He didn't seem to be able to reach the Latina/o or African-American working class.

The anger that seemed to fuel the Sanders campaign is a particularly male anger, as the consistently aggressive behavior of that segment of his supporters referred to as "Bernie Bros" indicated. In this, as CNN's MJ Lee noted in April, he has given the Trump campaign a reason to think Sanders supporters may vote Republican in November. This speculation became so widespread that in June, Sanders rejected any comparisons between the campaigns on *Meet the Press*. But gendered politics had an effect on the Democratic primary process.

Whatever else can be said about Hillary Clinton as a candidate—that she lacks the charisma of other recent Democratic candidates, for instance—she has a full grasp of the issues, decades of experience in the public eye, and a deep understanding of party primary rules and processes. As the number of "Why I'm Voting for Hillary Clinton" articles and essays attest, Democratic voters argue that she understands the Democratic Party as a coalition whose members are more interested in policy goals and political inclusion than in poetry. They cite her experience, her qualifications, her policy positions, and, occasionally, even her gender as reasons for their support. It is significant that people of color

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If stability and predictability were the hallmarks of the Democratic primary campaign season, the Republican process was characterized by their polar opposites.

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supported her over Sanders by overwhelming margins. These are the Democratic Party's most reliable voters. They do the hard work of organizing, registering voters, and getting them to the polls. These voters have been paying attention to national politics for a long time, and they remember the extent of Clinton's advocacy. She did not have to do a lot of work to get Democrats in her corner because she has been a public advocate for their causes for many years.

It is also true, of course, that as a woman, she faces hurdles white male candidates don't. She was the only one criticized for raising her voice. And, like Republican Carly Fiorina, Clinton was told to smile more. These are non-trivial markers of the gendered bias with which she has had to contend. She deals with bias in much the same way Barack Obama consistently has done: by being the grown-up in the room, by rising above the more obvious signs of bias, and by depicting opponents as childish or lacking presidential-level stature or character. Her speeches are laden with policy talk, and she connects specific policy with arguments about democracy in general. In a campaign speech in Milwaukee last March, for example, she argued that the Republican refusal to vote on Merrick Garland's nomination to the Supreme Court was "the latest in a long line of actions aimed at disrupting our government and undermining our president," marking the entire Republican Party as complicit in tactics that have given rise to pernicious politics.

She has also taken on Donald Trump more directly, stating that he "is not qualified to be president," referring to his rhetoric as "political arson," and consistently labeling him "dangerous," "offensive," and "divisive." When Donald Trump accused her of playing "the woman card," and insisted that she would not be

a viable candidate if not for her gender, the Clinton campaign first issued donors their own "woman cards" and then sold entire packs of playing cards dedicated to the theme of women's economic and political equality. This example nicely encapsulates the Clinton campaign: a bit stodgy, pragmatic, able to capitalize on opponents' miscues, and leavened with a bit of humor.

Clinton is a known quantity running under the auspices of a well-organized and reasonably united party. There is nothing flashy about her campaign; she moved steadily through a long but fairly stable process and appears set to quietly make history. If she prevails, this will be in part due to the massive implosion on the other side of the partisan divide.

#### **INSTABILITY: THE REVOLUTION WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY**

If stability and predictability were the hallmarks of the Democratic primary campaign season, the Republican process was characterized by their polar opposites. But as Theodore H. Lowi noted in *The End of the Republican Era*, the modern Republican Party has never really been united. Instead, it is best understood as managing tension between its patrician wing (think Nelson Rockefeller, George H.W. Bush, or, to a lesser extent, Mitt Romney) and its populist wing (personified by Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, and the like). Republicans who have achieved the White House did so by uniting the members of these two wings, a task that has become increasingly difficult over time, not least because of the rise of the Tea Party Republicans and the fact that the populist wing increasingly controls the nomination process. Candidates who appease populists and win the nomination must find their way back toward the patricians in time to unite the party before the general election.



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Primary battles are, by definition, efforts to split hairs. Candidates must distinguish themselves from people with whom they have a great deal in common, so they make considerable noise about fine distinctions.

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In 2016, two things happened. First, no viable representative of the patrician wing entered the primaries, so the competition wasn't between relative moderate and conservative versions of Republican ideology, but between members of the populist wing dedicated to outdoing one another. This drove the entire process to the right. Second, the party itself reached a point of institutional crisis, and Donald Trump, largely because he had no loyalty to institutional party logics, was able to exploit that crisis by relying on media logics, which he understands quite well and with which he has considerable practice.

Primary battles are, by definition, efforts to split hairs. Candidates must distinguish themselves from people with whom they have a great deal in common, so they make considerable noise about fine distinctions. The more closely allied candidates are, the more noise they make about increasingly small differences. So a typical bit of verbiage in a primary debate would go something like this example from Senator Ted Cruz in February: "I'm the only one on this stage that said, 'Do not go into Iraq. Do not attack Iraq.' Nobody else said that. And I said it loud and strong. And I was in the private sector. I wasn't a politician, fortunately." Here, the senator insisted that

he was right on policy, that his vision from the outside was better than the vision of political insiders. He relied on policy, not character, to make his argument. This is the kind of rhetoric we associate with a stable political process. Generally, then, primary voters choose among similar candidates and may do so for fairly idiosyncratic reasons: style, specific single issues, and so on. But that assumes a robust institutional context, which the Republicans did not have in the 2015–2016 primary season.

Republicans have been frustrated by eight years of a president they loathe. They could—and did—stymie some of his policies, but they failed in their efforts to destroy his signature policy, "Obamacare." They faced internal challenges from the Tea Party. And, as NPR's Ruth Tam reported in February, the pieties propagated by conservative talk radio, Fox News, and their pundit class created a constituency that was disenchanted by the political process and fueled by outrage.

Into this political miasma stepped Donald Trump, who catered to the outrage on the one hand, while offering a personalized vision of hope on the other. He offered both claims about the ways in which the nation was not currently succeeding and a promise that under



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Generally, then, primary voters choose among similar candidates and may do so for fairly idiosyncratic reasons: style, specific single issues, and so on.

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his leadership, it would be made great again. In this political environment, and given the weakness of the Republican Party structure, both the anger and the hope resonated with a percentage of the party faithful. But given the lack of a moderate alternative, that percentage proved enough to earn him the nomination.

Part of his appeal is undoubtedly based on racism, misogyny, and xenophobia. Many journalists, Jamelle Bouie most prominent among them, have pointed to the ways in which his coalition is, on the surface, about economics, but is, underneath, organized largely around race and racist appeals. These are whites who believe that their place in the national imaginary is threatened and shrinking. They are not wrong. Which is, of course, no excuse for the rhetoric and behaviors he and his supporters have spewed forth. Trump is a major party candidate who has brought out the latent Republican Party "dog whistle" politics by calling undocumented Mexican immigrants "rapists"; who implied that Megyn Kelly's "tough" questions were evidence of her menstrual cycle; who promised to close our borders to Muslims; who argued that women who obtain abortions should be punished, and perhaps even imprisoned; who seemingly incited violence at his public events; and who seems entirely oblivious to the possibility that these things may constitute a breach of the decorum we associate with the presidency. He also seems unconcerned with the fact that his rhetoric is ripping gaping holes in the fabric of our national identity.

He is, I think, unconcerned with this possibility because he is ripping these gaping holes with intention. He and his supporters seem to object to a nation that includes people of color and is now led by one of those people. They resent women and the possibility that one may soon win the presidency. They feel displaced and



blame that on those who have arrived here more recently than they. Their most virulent resentment, however, is reserved for matters of race. These resentments have simmered and festered in the nation for decades.

The very crassness and crudity of Trump's political language testifies to the visceral nature of his campaign—which at this writing has been singularly lacking in any actual policy. He isn't promising political solutions for the grievances he exacerbates; he has no means of preventing change. Manufacturing jobs are not returning; they were lost to economic forces long in place. The nation is becoming more multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious; demography is a force Trump cannot stop. LGBTQ rights are increasingly accepted, and as recent trends indicate, federal laws will hasten changes protecting those rights. What he has done is to provide a voice—a loud, insistent, uncivil, and effective voice—that speaks the rage of those who feel disenfranchised by these changes.

It is important to note that this voice is not aimed at changing party politics or at building a party agenda. Trump's most frequently used word on Twitter is, after all, "I." He is making a bid for personal power. He is offering a spectacle that defies institutional logics, that claims media and elite attention, and that confounds his opposition. But as personal as Trump's campaign has been, if he loses in the general election, it will not be purely personal. It will take the current party system with him.

#### **POLITICAL RHETORIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE: BRINGING THE VOTERS HOME**

Despite the resurgence of right-wing governments globally, Donald Trump is not, I think, a portent of an ugly, authoritarian, American politics built on racism, xenophobia, sexism, and fear. United States voters will be offered that choice in November, and I hope that they



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The party that can build its coalition, that can provide a political home for most voters, will be the one that dominates in elections to come, and will be the one to enact its policy preferences, and conceivably change administrative structures in accordance with its understanding of how we ought to conduct the nation's business.

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will reject it, and in so doing will drive its more blatant expressions back into the shadows of our national politics.

But those elements will not be rendered powerless simply because their loudest contemporary advocate is denied the presidency. The voters who espouse those beliefs, like the disappointed Sanders voters, who espouse a very different kind of politics, will be in search of a politics that helps them to feel at home in their nation. So long as these visions are unmoored from the rhetoric of the major political parties, they will continue to search.

Both parties thus face an extended moment of political peril and opportunity. The party that can build its coalition, that can provide a political home for most voters, will be the one that dominates in elections to come, and will be the one to enact its policy preferences, and conceivably change administrative structures in accordance with its understanding of how we ought to conduct the nation's business.

Reform that is slow and dependent on political compromise offers stability and change, and is the consistent mainstay of U.S. politics. That consistency is periodically interrupted by the more dramatic call for revolution and institutional change. Both kinds of politics are, I would argue, important and necessary. If Democrats rely too heavily on incremental change, and insist only on a kind of procedural democracy, they may find themselves speaking only to the already included. If Republicans keep insisting that change must be arrested, they may find themselves on the political margins of a country that seems to yearn for an inspiration politics that will move us somehow forward, and somehow together. Americans face, it seems to me, a moment of political change in which existing coalitions will be upended and reformed. The nature of that reformation is up to us. If this campaign season has made anything clear, it is the dangers and possibilities of such change. ■



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**FORTHCOMING SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**The Changing Face of  
Presidential Campaigns**  
**Editor: Mary E. Stuckey**  
**Volume 103, Issue 1, 2017**

The “changing face” of the campaigns addressed in this issue includes discussions of both historical and the current campaign; individual candidacies as a window into important campaign processes; and elements of popular culture and campaign texts that serve to highlight significant elements of the ideological landscape in which campaigns occur.

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NCA 102<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION

# COMMUNICATION'S CIVIC CALLINGS

# PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS

## NCA'S 102<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION CONVENES IN PHILADELPHIA

just two days after Election Day, 2016. Scholars from across the discipline will discuss this momentous election on panels and at roundtables happening every day at the convention. Some of those sessions (all to be held at the Marriott Downtown) include:

### THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10

**3:30–4:45 p.m., Grand Salon A-Level 5**  
**Rhetorical Strategies, Implications and Consequences of the 2016 Unprecedented Presidential Campaign**  
*Sponsor: Political Communication Division*

Political communication and rhetoric scholars discuss what has just occurred and its implications for the future of political communication. Topics will include (de)evolution of political rhetoric, the (re)construction of how Americans perceive the presidency in the 21st century, and how the mutability of the electorate has driven shifts in rhetorical strategies.

### FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11

**8:00–9:15 a.m., Room 402-Level 4**  
**My Reflections on the 2016 Presidential Election**  
*Sponsor: Emeritus/Retired Members Section*

NCA's 83rd president, Judith Trent, leads a group of scholars reflecting on many aspects of the 2016 presidential campaign, including feminine campaign style, media attention, and comparisons with previous presidential election cycles.

**2:00–3:15 p.m., Room 501-Level 5**  
**Culture "Trumps" Politics**  
*Sponsor: American Studies Division*

This panel examines how popular culture has influenced political elections in the United States, going back to the 1960s. The counter-culture revolutions increased democracy but at the same time built an individual hedonistic and narcissistic perception of reality.

**3:30–4:45 p.m., Grand Salon A-Level 5**  
**From Columns to Characters: The Presidency and the Press in the Digital Age, Campaign 2016**  
*Sponsor: Political Communication Division*

Previewing a forthcoming book, this session examines the question: How did new journalism technologies like vlogging, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Vine, podcasting, snapchatting, and so on reconfigure the race for the White House in 2016, if it did so at all?

### SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12

**9:30–10:45 a.m., Room 308-Level 3**  
**Voting from the Margins 2016: Making Feminist, Queer, Latinx, and #BlackVotesMatter**  
*Sponsor: Feminist and Women Studies Division*

Panelists from across communication studies share new research regarding diverse groups of voters in this election cycle. Open conversation will explore historical shifts in dis/enfranchisement, voter apathy and activism, and internal debates and divisions fracturing feminist, LGBTQ, Latinx, and Black voters in 2016, while assessing recent election results.

**11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m., Room 413-Level 4**  
**Spotlight Panel 2016 Election: Hillary Rodham Clinton's Presidential Campaign Rhetoric**  
*Sponsor: Public Address Division*

A distinguished group of Public Address scholars of the American presidency will discuss Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign.

**12:30–1:45 p.m., Room 413-Level 4**  
**Spotlight Panel 2016 Election: Trump's Insurgency: Demagoguery, Perversion, and Identity**  
*Sponsor: Public Address Division*

This panel considers the question of demagoguery, with special attention to the campaign insurgency of Donald Trump. Offering a specific definition of demagoguery as a generic matter, the session takes up the question of demagoguery in the context of Trump's campaign, approaching it respectively from the perspective of psychoanalysis, deliberative theory, and argumentation.

**2:00–3:15 p.m., Grand Salon A-Level 5**  
**Senior Scholar Spotlight Panel: What Just Happened? A Presidential Election Postmortem**  
*Sponsor: Political Communication Division*

With the election of the nation's 45th president occurring just two days before NCA's 102nd Annual Convention, this panel of senior political communication scholars will help dissect what just happened. Specifically, each panelist will identify key moments and events in the presidential campaign and offer analysis of the campaign communication.



“Bern the Witch” AND “Trump that Bitch”:

# Likability/Loathability

ON THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN TRAIL

By Karrin Vasby Anderson, Ph.D.



A political cartoon by Thomas Nast depicting Victoria Woodhull as the devil holding a banner, “Be saved by free love,” addressed to women burdened by a drunk husband.

Although women have had the right to vote at the national level for nearly 100 years, 2016 produced an important first in U.S. presidential politics—not the first time a woman has run for president. Women have been seeking presidential office since before they won the right to vote, with Victoria Woodhull launching the first bid in 1872, and contemporary female politicians such as Elizabeth Dole, Carol Moseley Braun, Michele Bachmann, Hillary Clinton, and Carly Fiorina waging losing campaigns for major-party presidential nominations in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2016, however, Hillary Clinton proved that the second time’s a charm, earning the Democratic presidential nomination after a failed attempt to do so in 2008. Having a woman at the top of a major-party ticket for the first time in U.S. history guaranteed that issues related to candidate gender would be central to the 2016 presidential campaign.

Of course, when it comes to presidential campaigns, gender has always been an important factor. Masculinity is central to the U.S. presidency and, as Jackson Katz argues, “U.S. presidential politics has long been the

Having a woman at the top of a major-party ticket for the first time in U.S. history guaranteed that issues related to candidate gender would be central to the 2016 presidential campaign.



site of an ongoing cultural struggle over the meanings of American manhood.” Whereas pundits and political scientists have tended to focus on the ways in which gender stereotypes affect women politicians’ electability, scholars in Communication Studies take a more expansive view of the importance of gender in modern presidential campaigns. By examining how U.S. “presidentiality” is gendered, Communication scholars have gained insight into the ways in which disparate discourses (news framing, candidate speeches, fictional representations, satirical sketches, social media, viral videos, etc.) shape cultural understanding of presidential leadership, positing perspectives that can help citizens make more fully informed choices at the ballot box. Of particular interest is one ambiguous metric of electability: whether or not a candidate is “likable.” The 2016 presidential campaign pitted two candidates with low favorability ratings against one another, but an assessment of Hillary Clinton’s and Donald Trump’s likability challenges reveals gendered portrayals of candidate favorability and the mainstreaming of pornified political discourses.



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Women seeking presidential office frequently are cast as lacking either the experience or the temperament required for presidential office, or they are viewed as domineering and pathologically ambitious.

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U.S. political culture has been “pornified” in ways that signal a backlash against the gains women have made in electoral politics. Assessment of the 2016 campaign’s political pornification reveals that traditional masculinity remains central to U.S. presidentiality.

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#### GENDER AND PRESIDENTIALITY

Many types of communication shape how we understand and evaluate our presidents and presidential candidates. Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles coined the term “presidentiality” to refer to the “ideological rhetoric that helps shape the cultural meaning of the institution of the presidency,” noting that citizens’ opinions about presidents and presidential candidates are influenced by communication that circulates not just in the political sphere, but in journalistic coverage, popular culture, digital discourses, and the like. By understanding how “presidentiality” is presented and negotiated in diverse cultural contexts, we can begin to understand more fully the expectations and constraints associated with presidential performances.

The U.S. presidency is a complex political role that fulfills both civic/political and social/ceremonial functions. U.S. presidents serve as commanders-in-chief, political heads of government, and ceremonial heads of state. The U.S. first ladyship has evolved as a complement to the presidency, with presidential spouses often taking the lead in the social/ceremonial sphere. Scholars such as Myra Gutin and Molly Meijer Wertheimer have documented the ways in which modern first ladies used their ceremonial platform to promote substantive political change, but the primary responsibility of presidential spouses historically has been to reinforce the president’s status as, in Suzanne Daughton’s words, “the national patriarch: the paradigmatic American Man.” First families stand in for the ideal U.S. family, just as presidents are expected to be ideal American citizens. Consequently, first ladies who are perceived to be transgressing the gendered boundaries of propriety by

being unduly involved in their husbands’ administrations historically have been castigated by the press, political opponents, and the public. The prospect of a woman president upsets this gendered frame entirely.

Because she entered the national political stage as the wife of presidential prospect Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton’s public image has been shaped, in part, by her tenure as U.S. first lady. Clinton was called on to fulfill a variety of roles during her husband’s time in office—leading his Task Force on Health Care Reform, acting as a global ambassador, and becoming “defender-in-chief” during a series of scandals involving allegations aimed at one or both Clintons. As Hillary Clinton built a national political profile, scholars began to assess the rhetoric of presidential spouses more closely, noting the ways in which responses to her revealed important insights about gender and power in the United States.

Central to this research is the notion of gender double binds—conflicts between role expectations that constrain women’s rhetorical options and influence how women are viewed. Of particular importance to political women is the double bind between femininity and competence, in which the standards for being an “appropriately” feminine woman are in conflict with those related to being seen as a credible leader. Women who attain leadership positions often are castigated as too aggressive, “bitchy,” or worse. Those who present themselves in a traditionally feminine way may maintain their likability, but they often are not viewed as credible leaders. During the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a handful of women achieved some success in major-party presidential primaries, but the vestiges of the femininity/competence double bind lingered.

#### FEAR AND LOATHABILITY ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

One of the ways in which the femininity/competence double bind emerges is through assessment of candidates’ “likability.” Male candidates have a broader range of acceptable behaviors than do female candidates. Women seeking presidential office frequently are cast as lacking either the experience or the temperament required for presidential office, or they are viewed as domineering and pathologically ambitious. Women candidates who aren’t “likable” tend to be loathed. Evaluating Clinton’s candidacy in May of 2016, *Time*’s Jay Newton-Smith observed that “Men, generally speaking, don’t face the capability test: most men are assumed to be tough enough and have the experience to handle the job. But women trying to prove their bona fides can easily overshoot and become too tough, and therefore not likeable.”

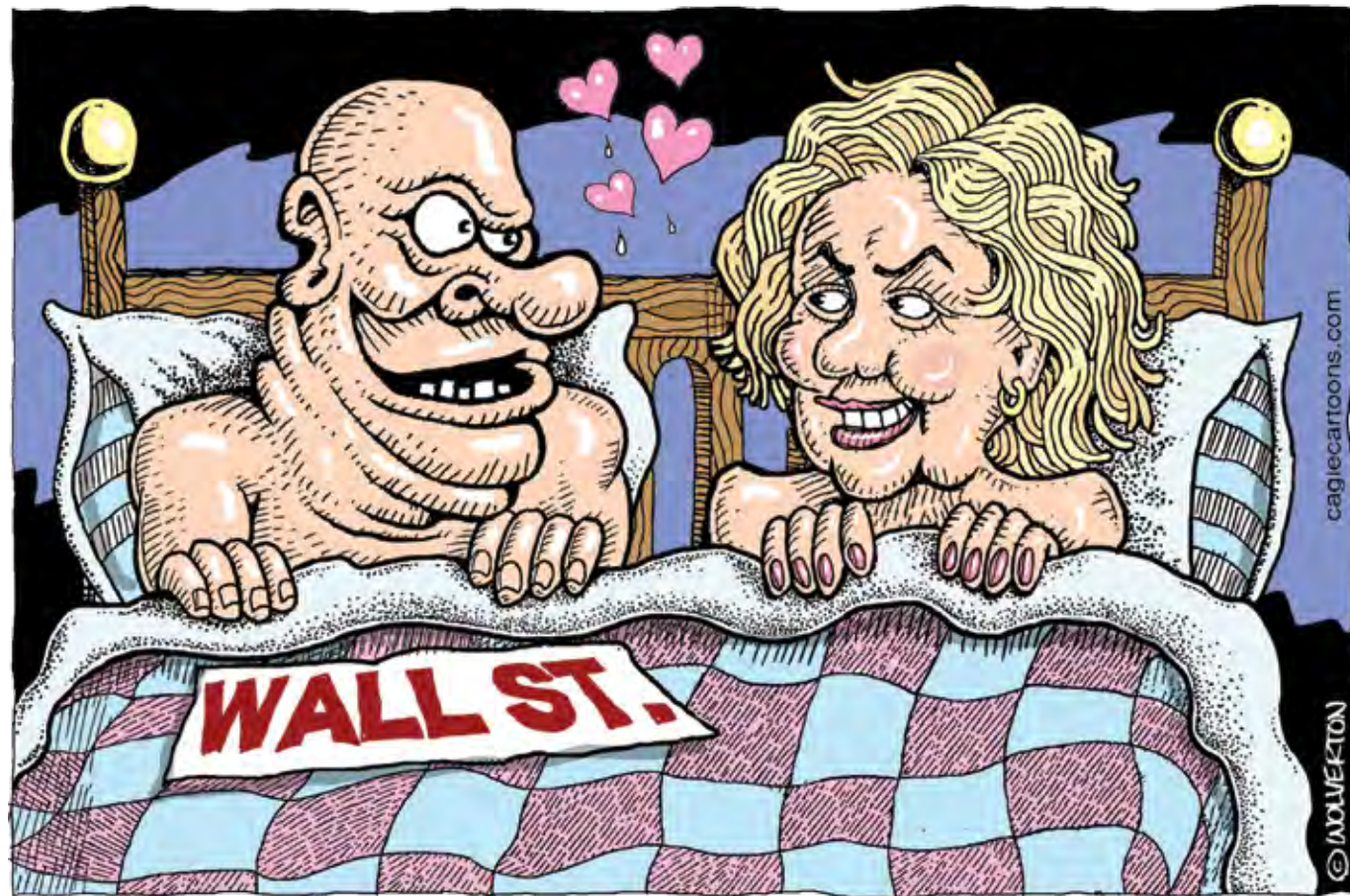
Throughout her public career, Clinton has been framed in ways that comport with the femininity/competence double bind. As an activist first lady, she was cast as a harridan and a shrew; as “Lady Macbeth in a headband”; as a “bitch.” Clinton was more favorably received when performing political roles that did not encroach on presidential power. As a U.S. senator, she was praised for being a “work horse, not a show horse,” and as U.S. Secretary of State, she was viewed as a loyal cabinet member and capable diplomat. When she decided to seek executive political power herself, however, the “likability” question reemerged. During the 2008 Democratic primary debates, Clinton was asked how she would respond to New Hampshire voters who “see your résumé and like it, but are hesitating on the likability issue.” Clinton gamely responded that the voters’ response “hurts my feelings,” noted that Barack Obama

was, indeed, “very likable,” and suggested, “I don’t think I’m that bad.” A grinning Obama interjected with a now infamous retort, telling Clinton, “You’re likable enough, Hillary.” Shawn J. Parry-Giles posits that this likability gap was produced by media frames that coalesced around Clinton in 1992, when she was framed as “too cold, hard-edged, and unlikable to serve as an admirable first lady or a viable elected official.” Journalists and political opponents deemed this view of Clinton the authentic view, and when Clinton or her supporters attempt to challenge or expand that perspective, she is dismissed as inauthentic and castigated as a “dubious and opportunistic celebrity politician.” What lies at the foundation of this framing of Clinton, according to Parry-Giles, is the press’s inability to accommodate the complexities of postmodern womanhood. Thus, the frames that constrict and distort Clinton’s public image ultimately affect all women negatively.

In 2016, the question of whether or not Clinton was “likable enough” resurfaced when she faced the popular, politically independent iconoclast Bernie Sanders in the Democratic presidential primary. Sanders positioned himself as the candidate of the people, alleging that Clinton was friendly to Wall Street and out of touch with the needs of working-class Americans. Legitimate policy differences between the two candidates were quickly subsumed by stereotypes about female power, with Clinton repeatedly depicted in journalistic headlines and editorial cartoons as a preening monarch or a scheming witch.

Sanders supporters and surrogates echoed journalistic sentiments. In October of 2015, a Sanders supporter posted an invitation on the campaign’s “Event Central” webpage for a “Bern the Witch” meet-up.





Although the Sanders campaign removed the event from its webpage after news of it went viral, the “Bern the Witch” slogan lingered in home-made signs and t-shirts spotted at campaign events. Trump supporters echoed the “witch/bitch” frame as well, with “Trump that Bitch” being one of the most popular slogans sported by supporters at his rallies. Photos of campaign buttons with the following slogans also went viral on Twitter: “Life’s a Bitch: Don’t Vote for One” and “KFC Hillary Special: 2 Fat Thighs, 2 Small Breasts . . . Left Wing.”

That last slogan (which first emerged during the 2008 presidential primary season) illustrates the ways in which gendered attacks on likability can become sexualized. Elsewhere, I have argued that U.S. political culture has been “pornified” in ways that signal a backlash against the gains women have made in electoral politics. Assessment of the 2016 campaign’s political pornification reveals that traditional masculinity remains central to U.S. presidentiality.

#### PORNING PRESIDENTIALITY

During one of the 2016 Republican primary debates, something unprecedented happened. *Vox’s* Emily

Crockett recounts it this way: “At the Fox News Republican presidential debate on Thursday, Donald Trump suggested that he has a large penis. This actually happened.” It did, although a bit of background explanation is required in order to fully understand the exchange. Way back in 1988, the satirical magazine *Spy* ran a parody ad for Trump’s book *The Art of the Deal* which contained a reference to the author as a “short-fingered vulgarian,” a label the magazine would repeat 12 times in the eight years that followed. An enraged Trump proceeded to send *Spy* founder Graydon Carter published photos of himself with his ostensibly normal-sized hands circled in gold Sharpie. Fast forward to the 2016 primary campaign. Trump’s Republican opponent Senator Marco Rubio resurrected the insult on the campaign trail, joking, “I don’t understand why his hands are the size of someone who is 5-foot-2. And you know what they say about men with small hands? You can’t trust them.” In *Vox’s* hard-hitting exposé on the situation, Libby Nelson cited the *Urban Dictionary* to support the claim that “Rubio’s ‘small hands’ joke was probably a slur on Trump’s penis size.” Trump confirmed that interpretation when he said this during a subsequent

[E]ditorial cartoonists visualized . . . coded implications, depicting the leading Democratic presidential contender both as being “in bed” with the big banks and as a prostitute soliciting customers on Wall Street.

Republican debate: “Look at those hands. Are they small hands? And he referred to my hands—if they’re small, something else must be small. I guarantee you there’s no problem, I guarantee.”

The spat between Rubio and Trump garnered much media attention, not because campaign journalists are particularly interested in the size of Trump’s personal tower. Instead, the incident typified his tendency to be thin-skinned and lash out emotionally at his opponents. The exchange underscores, however, that one way to oppose a presidential prospect is to insult his masculinity. Michael Kimmel notes that in 1840, William Henry Harrison famously undercut Martin Van Buren’s credibility by contrasting Van Buren’s “ruffled shirts” with his own “manly virtues and log cabin birth.” The insult that damaged George H.W. Bush the most during his presidency was the “wimp” charge, and Rubio’s jab at Trump came in response to Trump nicknaming him “Little Marco.”

Although the trend of political pornification is exemplified by Donald Trump’s discussion of his own penis size during a nationally televised debate, it is not the sole example. In April 2016, a Bernie Sanders campaign surrogate castigated “corporate Democratic whores” when criticizing Clinton’s incrementalist approach to health care reform. Sanders repudiated the surrogate’s choice of the word “whore,” but continued to call Clinton out for receiving hefty speaking fees from Goldman Sachs. Soon, CNN reported that Sanders supporters threw dollar bills at Clinton’s motorcade and chanted “Hey hey, ho ho, Hillary Clinton has got to go.” Writing for *Blue Nation Review*, Peter Daou asserted:

Taken separately, one might rationalize terms like “corporate Democratic whore,” chants like “Hey hey, ho ho, Hillary Clinton has got to go,” and actions like throwing dollar bills at her. Taken collectively, it is increasingly difficult to avoid the gendered implications of this coded language.

Indeed, editorial cartoonists visualized those coded implications, depicting the leading Democratic presidential contender both as being “in bed” with the big banks and as a prostitute soliciting customers on Wall Street.

Unfortunately, “whore” was not the worst sexualized slur with which Clinton had to contend during the campaign. In previous research, I have written about how the term “cunt” was hurled at her during the 2008 primary, with Republican interests using the misogynistic label to characterize her as unfit for the presidency. In 2016, the strategy resurfaced. Shortly before he was scheduled to make a speech supporting Donald Trump at the Republican National Convention, 1980s celebrity Scott Baio tweeted this photo:







This rhetoric flourishes in campaign ephemera despite the fact that when surveyed about their willingness to vote for a qualified woman presidential candidate from their own political party, most Americans respond positively.

As I have noted in my research, the term “cunt” represents “not just sexism but a misogynistic hatred of women,” one which, when deployed in the context of a presidential campaign, disciplines “individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms.” Indeed, according to *Media Matters for America*, Ted Nugent, who serves on the board of the National Rifle Association, characterized Clinton as a “worthless bitch,” “toxic cunt,” and “two-bit whore”; he also claimed that she has “spare scrotums.” In April of 2015, a Trump staffer retweeted a joke about Clinton failing to satisfy America because she “can’t satisfy her husband”.

Trump disavowed and deleted the tweet, but in December of 2015, Trump downplayed Clinton as a political opponent, saying that she “got schlonged” in 2008.

Nugent’s rant, like the Baio and Trump tweets, illustrates what happens when the femininity/competence double bind is deployed through pornified political discourses. Women who close in on positions of executive leadership are deemed unfeminine, unattractive, and unnatural. This rhetoric flourishes in campaign ephemera

despite the fact that when surveyed about their willingness to vote for a qualified woman presidential candidate from their own political party, most Americans respond positively.

This essay was completed after the conclusion of the Republican and Democratic national conventions—historic not only for the uniqueness of the candidates nominated but also for their low favorability ratings. Rather than voting for a candidate they like, voters in 2016 are more likely to be motivated to vote against a candidate they loathe. Of course, not everyone who deems Clinton or Trump unfit for the presidency is motivated by sexist conceptions of presidentiality. Policy differences and personal temperament distinguish the candidates from one another as well. This brief assessment of candidate “likability,” however, reveals the ways in which masculinity remains an integral component of U.S. presidentiality. Electing a woman as U.S. president will not immediately make the U.S. presidency a gender-neutral office, but creating the conditions in which a diverse pool of candidates can thrive will help reduce fear and loathing on the presidential campaign trail. That’s something that everyone can like. ■



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# Whiteness, Economic Precarity, and Presidential Politics

By Lisa M. Corrigan, Ph.D.

Watching the 2016 presidential election unfold, it seems clear that the politics of whiteness dominates how many Americans understand the presidency as an office and the election cycle as a spectacle. This current backlash cycle has emerged in response to the tremendous economic decline during the Bush Administration and the politics of race during the Obama Administration. And while Senator Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump contended that they represent populist impulses on the left and right, respectively, former Secretary

of State Hillary Clinton continued to outperform both of them with voters of color, especially in the South. These three White candidates emerged in a political moment where whiteness is the dominant frame to understand how their campaigns propelled the candidates toward the conventions and onward to the November finish line.

This campaign cycle showcases the convergence of two major variables: economic decline and White fragility. The economic decline includes decades of stagnant wages, an unrelenting widening of the rich-poor gap,





tremendous college debt, mass incarceration, neo-segregation, and relatively high unemployment (especially among less skilled laborers) and underemployment as many wage workers occupy part-time rather than full-time jobs. Perhaps most important in this economic milieu is the tremendous concentration of political power amassed by the corporate and financial elite, which exerts incredible influence on the U.S. economic regime.

White fragility is a term coined by Robin D'Angelo to describe how Whites are shielded from racial stress to such an extent that even minimal racial tension is unbearable to them, causing a multitude of protective emotional maneuvers. When White people fear that their racial privilege is being threatened by, for example, immigration or Black activism, they feel outraged, frightened, and guilty. Such feelings can lead to aggressive and argumentative behaviors, or to withdrawal, as they retreat from the dissonance created by their complicity in racial violence. Contemporary White fragility is shaped by several political factors, including the election of Barack Obama, the “Browning of America” as White American fertility rates continue to decline, xenophobia, race panic about immigration, #BlackLivesMatter activism, and racist stereotypes circulating as a result of the War on Terror.

#### THE UNBEARABLE WHITENESS OF BEING DONALD TRUMP

The economic decline, along with remarkable performances of public and private White fragility, has combined to propel a resurgence of explicitly racist and xenophobic discourse. Most obviously, Donald Trump capitalizes on White fragility to shape his version of white populism. His hyper-masculine whiteness has led him to question whether President Obama was born in the United States, to assert that the United States should build a wall between the Texas border and Mexico, to label Mexicans “criminals” and “rapists,” and to call for a “temporary ban” on Muslim immigration. His racist rhetorical flourishes provoke and amplify anxieties about racial differences, which justify criminalization and marginalization of non-White Americans.

Beyond his own provocative statements that pathologize non-White people are the public endorsements of Trump by White supremacists. Trump’s White supremacist admirers include writers at *The Daily Stormer*, a leading neo-Nazi news site; Richard Spencer, director of the National Policy Institute, a prominent White nationalist organization; Jared Taylor, editor of *American Renaissance*, a Virginia-based White nationalist magazine; Michael Hill, head of the

White fragility is shaped by several political factors, including the election of Barack Obama, the “Browning of America” as White American fertility rates continue to decline, xenophobia, race panic about immigration, #BlackLivesMatter activism, and racist stereotypes circulating as a result of the War on Terror.

League of the South, a White supremacist secessionist organization based in Alabama; and Brad Griffin, author of the popular White supremacist blog *Occidental Dissent*. An NBC affiliate recently ran an interview with a purported Ku Klux Klan “imperial wizard” from Virginia, who praised Trump as the “best for the job.” Trump’s appeal to this population is clear: he articulates how extremist White people (men, in particular) simultaneously feel both a sense of displacement and a sense of entitlement about property, history, and political power.

Comparisons to other White demagogues such as George Wallace, Joseph McCarthy, and Adolf Hitler suggest that at least some media commentators recognize the similarities among these men, even if they don’t isolate economic precarity and White fragility as the factors that propelled all of them into leadership positions. But Trump’s acceptance of campaign supporters who promote the notion that White people are facing a social and political genocide lends credence to such comparisons. Plagiarizing Ronald Reagan’s campaign slogan to “Make America Great Again,” Trump uses similar nativist appeals that produce paranoia and feelings of intense White fragility and economic insecurity.

It is the affective or emotional politics of Trump’s acceptance of White supremacist rhetoric that is most successful because he actually *is* articulating the anger, fear, shame, and guilt that accompany the socio-economic shifts shaping this year’s contest. Given these circumstances and their historical antecedents, Trump’s populism is predictably short on logos but heavy on pathos, highlighting just how important emotional appeals are to the White voters who feel disenfranchised, dispossessed, and unrepresented in response to heightened economic uncertainty and the remarkable public outcry about anti-Black and -Brown violence. Scapegoating immigrants, people of color, poor people, Muslims, and activists works to solidify identification with whiteness, which explains Trump’s popularity among White supremacists. Guaranteeing

equality, racial and otherwise, means that people with privilege (in this case, White people) must give up their death grip on controlling the culture to engineer in-group success. But where structural inequality is interpreted by Trump as “political correctness,” it is no wonder that White voters feel simultaneously entitled to the privileges that accrue as a result of one’s light skin and fragile, because those entitlements might be lost.

In catalyzing these feelings about whiteness, pundits point to the fact that Trump may be destroying the GOP, especially because young voters overwhelmingly call him a racist and because his political ground game is underfunded. This outcome is certainly possible. Far more likely, however, is that his candidacy serves to underscore how neoliberal politics have consistently invested in anti-Black and -Brown politics to the terrible detriment of the country.

#### BLACK RAGE, WHITE MOUTHPIECE: BERNIE SANDERS AND RACE

For his part, Bernie Sanders navigated similar socio-economic shifts in ways that exposed the left’s inability to fully appreciate and navigate their complicity in White supremacist politics. As the only candidate running in 2016 that has ever won an election as a socialist, Sanders’s slogan “the political revolution is coming” suggested that political institutions need to be destroyed and rebuilt. Where Trump advances a populism that also wants to destroy institutions in which the people have lost faith, he offers no specifics or policy proposals to get there, preferring to emote rather than engage in nuanced policy discussion. Sanders offered ideas (though not fleshed-out policy proposals) to address dozens of issues that focused on income inequality, wages, and workers’ rights. And without a doubt, these policy issues are places that would *substantially* improve living conditions for Black and Brown America, as Sanders surrogates such as Adolph Reed and Cornel West have repeatedly argued. But with the disruption of stump speeches and campaign rallies by #BlackLivesMatter



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Where critics of Sanders have noted his inability to demonstrate a real understanding of how Black lives continue to be disproportionately affected by police practices and state and federal legislation, the same cannot be said about Clinton.

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activists early in the campaign, and by Sanders' early unwillingness to talk about race in the idiom of privilege, he was unable to navigate the racial conversation.

As Sanders was forced to confront the demands by #BLM activists that he shift tactics in speaking about race, particularly about police brutality, he appealed to hip hop artists to make the case for his deep understanding of anti-Black and -Brown violence. Campaigning with Georgia hip hop MC Killer Mike was one strategy that helped Sanders harness some of the rage of Black America through a proxy that would speak to young people and urban Black folks. Endorsements by Bun B., T.I., Scarface, Meshell Ndegeocello, Big Boi, and Lil B. helped position Sanders as a "Blackened" candidate, much like Bill Clinton was perceived after his 1992 appearance on the *Arsenio Hall Show*. *Rolling Stone* magazine even did a hip hop supercut of Sanders' stump speeches to tout his hip hop credibility. Online media outlets have argued that Sanders has "inspired a new generation of hip hop activism."

Sanders used hip hop to position himself as a racially sensitive candidate, with a politics distinct from White liberalism. While Sanders accessed many of the themes that undergird Trump's populism among Whites, he did so by also harnessing hip hop's oppositional ethos and deploying a politics of rage to cultivate young voters. A 74-year-old White socialist from Vermont campaigned with hip hop artists as a way of credentialing his rage with the kind of identity politics that lent him some credibility with young voters of color. Through this strategy, he tried to create space between himself and the Democrats with whom he has always caucused. Ultimately the strategy failed, but it was based on the notion that he needed to cultivate a White rage that successfully addressed feelings of White fragility in America that Trump has been able to successfully engage. In other words, even with Sanders engaging in a more palatable form of identity politics in his partnership with hip hop artists, he still harnessed White fragility and economic precarity to propel his candidacy.



Hillary Clinton with Sybrina Fulton (mother of Trayvon Martin), Gwen Carr (mother of Eric Garner), and Wanda Johnson (mother of Oscar Grant).

#### HILLARY CLINTON: LIBERAL COALITION BUILDING

For her part, Hillary Clinton does not frequently perform White fragility as part of her appeal. Her campaign slogan, "Stronger Together," clearly resists divisive race-talk and is an explicitly populist call for embracing plurality. By occupying the center of the liberal space on whiteness and race-talk, Clinton's rhetorical interventions into the discourses of whiteness are complicated by the high regard by which she is held by Black voters, especially in the South.

As a White female Democrat, coming as she does on the heels of the first Black male president in American history, Clinton's candidacy has augmented White male fears that their privilege is eroding. The fact that polls show her as the favorite among Black Americans feeds into the feelings of White fragility that are amplified by the Trump campaign. And where critics of Sanders have noted his inability to demonstrate a real understanding of how Black lives continue to be disproportionately affected by police practices and state and federal legislation, the same cannot be said about Clinton. Because of her lengthy tenure in Arkansas as a champion of women and children and also her ability to move beyond the awkward stiffness

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Especially at the Democratic National Convention, where [Clinton] showcased grieving mothers of young Black Americans who have been killed by police as "Mothers of the Movement" alongside Black and Brown heroes, intellectuals, and activists, she has worked to articulate structural racism.

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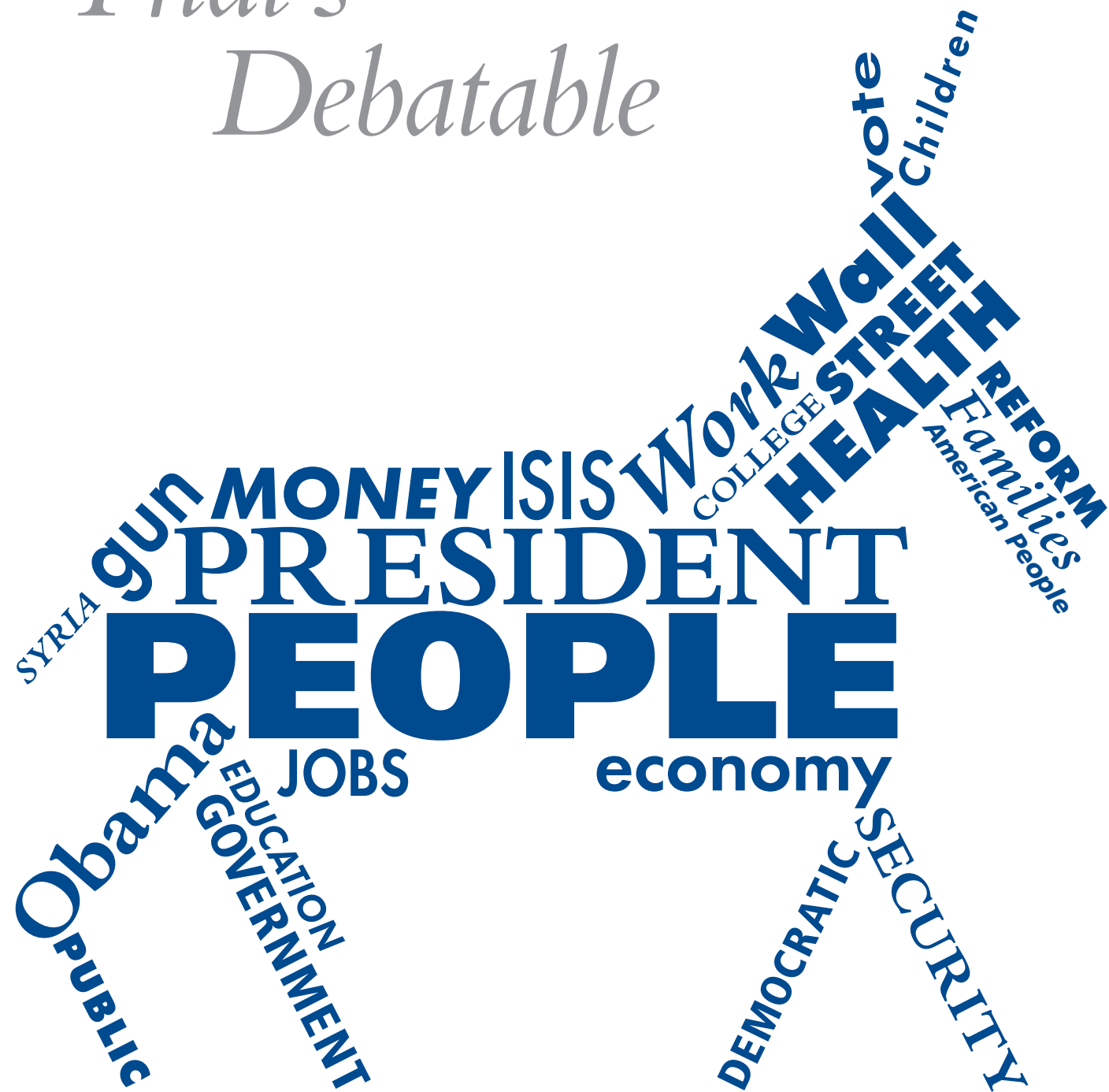
of most White politicians discussing racial issues, Clinton is perceived as more attuned to how Black and Brown Americans experience life. Especially at the Democratic National Convention, where she showcased grieving mothers of young Black Americans who have been killed by police as "Mothers of the Movement" alongside Black and Brown heroes, intellectuals, and activists, she has worked to articulate structural racism. Clinton's emphasis is clearly on liberal coalition building. And while some liberals may not prefer her to be the candidate doing this work, the fact remains that she continues to be well-positioned to actually build the voting coalitions that will secure a win in November. Her popularity among Black voters contributed to her lopsided wins in the Southern primaries and certainly suggests that she and Trump will basically be fighting over White male voters.

A best-case scenario for liberals is that Trump's White supremacy pushes the GOP to the left. More likely, however, is that GOP defectors join the Democratic Party's coalition and push it to the right, especially on economic and military issues. As endless listicles chronicle all of the former GOP presidents, senators, members of Congress, governors, and military notables who support Clinton, the overwhelming number of White men (and a few women) on these lists suggest that their (White) support can help Clinton swing White undereducated male voters to her. Thus, the consequences of her coalition building hinges on the circulation and augmentation of whiteness for a White audience, even as Clinton appeals (in many positive ways) to communities of color. It remains to be seen how these multiple, polysemic discourses of whiteness will influence the parties beyond the 2017 inauguration. ■



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That's  
Debatable



WORDS USED FREQUENTLY AT THE DEMOCRATIC  
AND REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DEBATES





# Debating the Presidency

By Benjamin R. Warner, Ph.D., and Mitchell S. McKinney, Ph.D.

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Every four years, the nominees of each major party gather for hours of unscripted, nationally televised joint appearances.

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Following the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon debates, the nation experienced a 16-year drought of general election debates before incumbent President Gerald Ford and challenger Jimmy Carter met on national television in 1976. Since the Ford/Carter exchanges, there has been an unbroken chain of televised presidential debates in every election. Though there is no law or campaign regulation that compels candidates to debate, voter expectations now make the risk of refusing to debate one's opponent too great for any candidate. Thus, every four years, the nominees of each major party gather for hours of unscripted, nationally televised joint appearances. In this brief essay, we review the history of presidential debates, discuss their effects on the electorate, and consider their place in an evolving campaign environment.

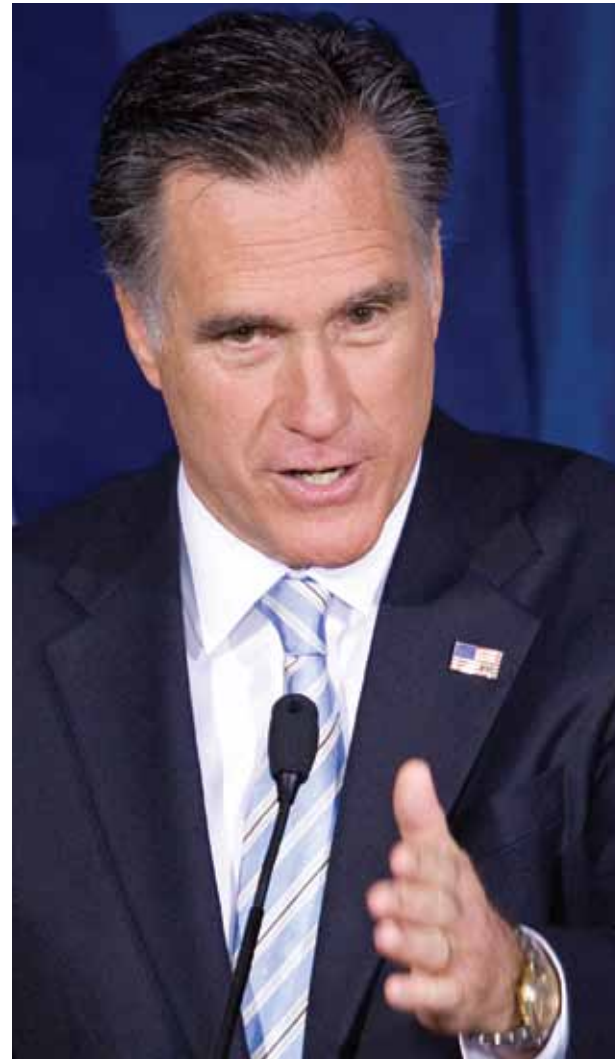


## HISTORY

The 1960 Kennedy/Nixon presidential debates happened in part because of the efforts of the American Forensics Association and members of the National Communication Association (NCA; then the Speech Association of America). NCA's role in arguing for the 1960 debate is documented in Austin J. Freeley's essay in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1961, v. 47). Though many hoped the 1960 debate would inaugurate a longstanding tradition, the next three presidential election cycles occurred absent any live televised exchanges between candidates. The televised presidential debate hiatus is likely attributable to two factors: Lyndon Johnson's concerns in 1964 regarding his limitations as a public orator; and, subsequently, Richard Nixon's lingering memories of his 1960 debates with John Kennedy. However, in 1976, Jimmy Carter

had incentive to debate—he needed to show himself to be presidential next to an incumbent president. Likewise, President Gerald Ford needed to debate to combat the perceived weaknesses of an incumbent who had never been elected to the office. Ford's decision to participate led to one of the most infamous moments in presidential debate history when, in an exchange with Max Frankel of *The New York Times*, Ford confidently declared, "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford administration."

Debates continued in 1980, despite President Carter's initial reluctance to debate Governor Ronald Reagan. Carter and Reagan clashed over the presence of Illinois Congressman John Anderson, a Republican who had lost to Reagan in the primary and launched a bid for the presidency as an Independent. Though Anderson met the



In 2012, the first debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney reached more than 70 million viewers.

Presidential debates have historically and continue to amass the largest viewing audience of any single televised campaign event. In most elections, the debates average more than 60 million viewers.

national polling threshold for participation that had been established by the League of Women Voters, Carter refused to participate if Anderson were included. The first debate occurred without Carter and featured Reagan and Anderson largely agreeing on criticisms of Carter's presidency. The second presidential and vice presidential debates were cancelled in 1980, with Carter and Reagan finally meeting one-on-one in a debate that occurred just seven days before the November election.

Since 1980, every presidential nominee from each major party has agreed to participate in the debates, and a single vice presidential debate also has occurred in each cycle since 1980. In 1992, Ross Perot became the second (and, to date, last) third-party candidate to meet the 15 percent participation threshold initially established by the League of Women Voters and enforced by the Commission on Presidential Debates since they took over organizing the debates from the League in 1988.

#### EFFECTS

Presidential debates have historically and continue to amass the largest viewing audience of any single televised campaign event. In most elections, the debates average more than 60 million viewers. In 2012, the first debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney reached more than 70 million viewers. Such voter reach provides an unprecedented opportunity for candidates to deliver their message and demonstrate their fitness for the office of the presidency. The vast viewership invites the common question, do these debates matter? Typically, those who pose this question mean to ask whether debates can change the outcome of an election.

In our own research, we have tracked the effects of debates by asking viewers to answer surveys including their voting intention immediately before and immediately after viewing the live debates. Our analysis includes nearly 7,000 respondents spanning the past four presidential elections. Eighty-six percent of participants in our studies

did not change their candidate preference after viewing the debate (for a full report, see the article "Do Presidential Debates Matter" in *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 2013, v. 49). Of the small percentage that did change, only 3.5 percent moved from one candidate to the other, with the remainder shifting from undecided to one of the candidates (7 percent) or from supporting a candidate to undecided (3.3 percent). Rather than shifting large numbers of voters, therefore, we have found that the debates primarily reinforce viewers' preexisting preferences.

Despite the small number of vote preferences changed during a debate, scholars believe that debates *can* be decisive under certain circumstances. For example, the 1960 and 2000 elections were so close that any number of influential factors—including the televised debates—could have changed the result. Many believe that Al Gore's poor performance in the first 2000 debate against George W. Bush, in which he frequently sighed and rolled his eyes, cost him at least the small margin of support that could have tilted the Electoral College away from Bush in the razor-thin election. Furthermore, Ford's misstatement about Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, combined with the significant negative press coverage that resulted, appears to have changed the dynamics of the 1976 contest. Finally, a case can be made that the 1980 debates provided Reagan the platform he needed to allay concerns about his competence, and that Carter's decision to cede the first debate to his two opponents contributed to his defeat. These examples all contain at least one of the following important features: a close election, a large number of undecided voters, a relatively unknown candidate, or a mistake from one participant so significant as to seem disqualifying to a large number of voters.

Because close elections increase the odds that any single event, especially one as widely viewed as a

presidential debate, can be decisive, one might expect debates to matter more in an era of close electoral contests. Even as our nation's closely divided partisan polarization could mean an end to the electoral landslides seen in 1964, 1972, and 1984, this polarization also means that far fewer voters are willing to change their vote on the basis of a candidate's debate performance. In fact, debates are more likely to increase the extent to which the electorate is polarized by providing partisan cues that remind voters why they support one candidate and oppose the other. This is precisely what we found when looking back at the presidential debates from 2000 to 2012 (see our article in *Communication Studies*, 2013, v. 64). Many of the most important effects of debates, however, do not result from persuading voters to support the opposing candidate. Instead, they come from the informational and attitudinal benefits accrued by viewing a debate.

Findings from numerous studies demonstrate that people who view presidential debates learn about the candidates' issue stances and infer information about their character and leadership skills. Furthermore, people are more likely to seek additional information about the campaign and pay closer attention to the election after viewing a debate. Debate viewers also become more likely to talk to others about the election, and even more likely to vote on Election Day. One of the most consistent effects of debate viewing demonstrated in our research is that viewers receive a significant increase in their political information efficacy—or the extent to which they believe they have the information necessary to participate meaningfully in politics. Political information efficacy is strongly linked to political participation, talking about politics, political interest, and voting, so the increase generated by debates represents a significant social benefit.



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Presidential debates promise an unscripted spectacle with the highest stakes imaginable for the participants. Viewers can join with millions of others to watch the debates in real time, or risk waking up to discover that they missed out on a truly memorable moment.

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#### DEBATES IN AN EVOLVING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The benefits of debate viewing are perhaps more significant than ever given the fragmented media environment ushered in by the digital age. Whereas it was once common for the majority of voters to learn about presidential candidates via nightly news programs on one of the three major broadcast networks, advances in technology have diluted these programs' influence. The advent of satellite and cable TV, for example, allows those disinterested in politics to select entertainment programming over the nightly news. Recording and streaming services allow people to consume entertainment programming around the clock, and the



limitless content presented online allows those disinterested in politics to consume all variety of alternative content. In this fragmented and entertainment-rich media environment, debates stand out as events that still reach massive audiences and deliver valuable information about the election.

In fact, it may be the promise of a widely viewed public spectacle that draws large audiences. Communication scholars and sociologists now write about the widespread “fear of missing out” that plagues today’s media consumer. Presidential debates promise an unscripted spectacle with the highest stakes imaginable for the participants. Viewers can join with millions of others to watch the debates in real time, or risk waking up to discover that they missed out on a truly memorable moment. Perhaps it is the search for spectacle, and the fear of missing a truly unexpected event, that drew so many viewers to the 2008 vice presidential debate between Alaska Governor Sarah Palin and Delaware Senator Joe Biden. Palin was a relatively unknown politician when selected by Arizona Senator John McCain to be his running mate. Though her selection initially resulted in a positive reception, largely stemming from her critically acclaimed convention speech, she had given a couple of disastrous interviews with Charlie Gibson and Katie Couric in the lead-up to the vice presidential debate. These interviews, and the Tina Fey-led *Saturday Night Live* spoofs that followed, may have piqued public interest in what exactly Palin would do or say in the vice presidential debate. Perhaps this intrigue explains why, for the first time in American history, the vice presidential debate drew more viewers than any of the presidential debates in 2008.

As major events with the promise of spontaneity, televised presidential debates provide the perfect conditions for second-screen “social” viewing. In other words, many viewers not only watch the debate, but watch (and contribute to) the instantaneous reactions on social media. The first presidential debate in 2012 became the most tweeted about political event of all time, to be surpassed only by Election Day itself. And whereas commentary was

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once distributed only through the nightly news and the morning paper, commentary on Twitter is instantaneous. In fact, when Gerald Ford misstated Soviet influence in Eastern Europe in 1976, it was not until the next evening’s nightly news broadcast that most voters were informed of this blunder, and it took up to 48 hours before his standing in the polls began to drop. Contrast this news cycle with the one following Mitt Romney’s infamous utterance of the phrase “binders full of women” in the second debate of 2012. In fewer than 90 seconds following these words leaving Romney’s mouth, the domain name [bindersfullofwomen.com](http://bindersfullofwomen.com) was secured by a Democratic super PAC and the phrase was well on its way—before the debate had even ended—to becoming one of the campaign’s dominant memes.

As with Palin in 2008, the 2016 debates have included an unpredictable and polarizing figure in real estate mogul Donald Trump. Thus, in many ways, the 2016 debates can be understood in the context of our past experiences. However, in at least one respect, these debates have been exceptional. Hillary Clinton is the first female nominee to participate in a nationally televised general-election presidential debate. This fall, as they have done now for more than half a century, those who seek to be our nation’s next leader have come before the American electorate to persuade citizens to entrust them with their vote. Though debates are not without their flaws, they continue to serve an important function in our electoral process and in many ways strengthen our democratic society. ■



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# Pop Culture and the Presidency

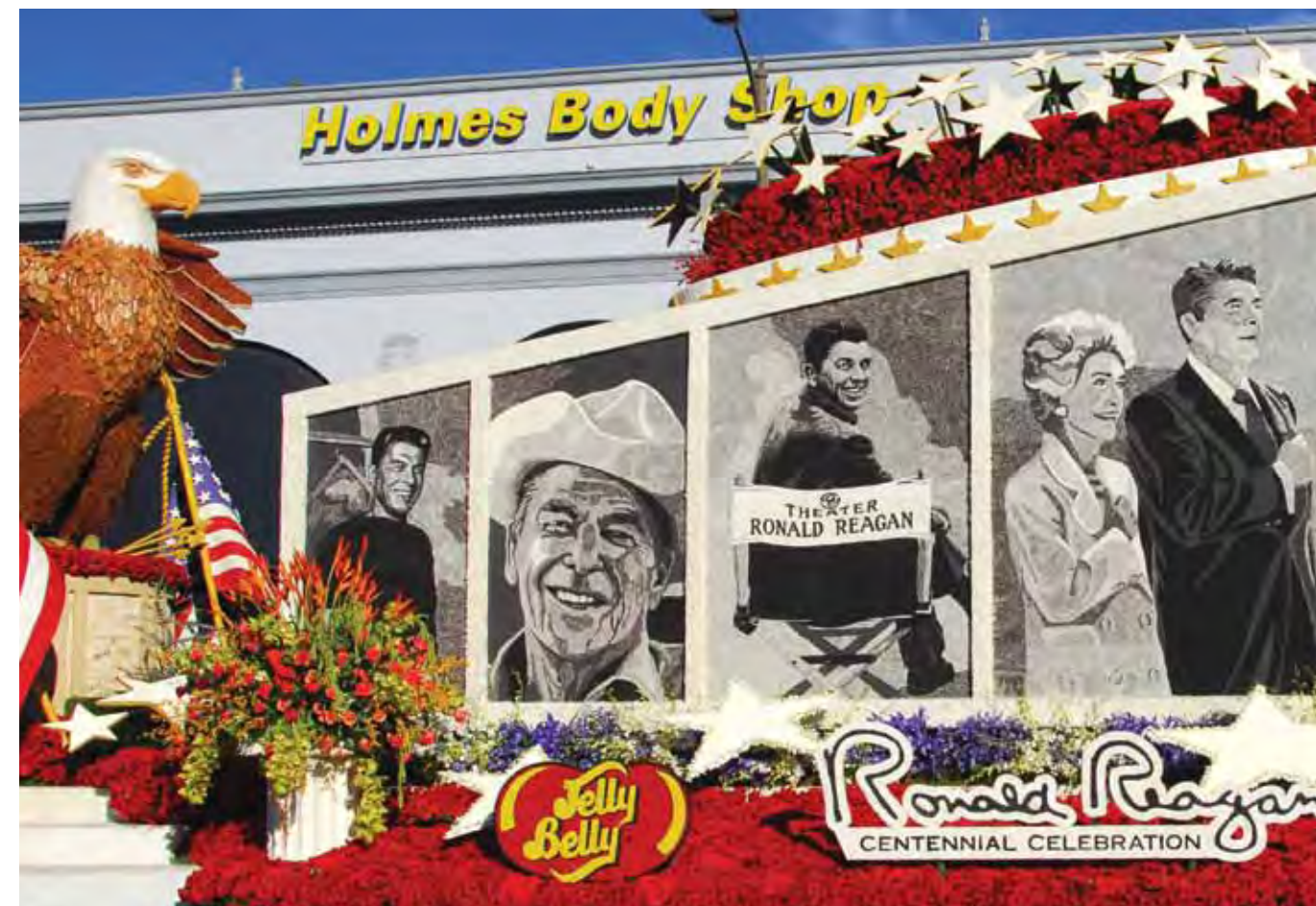
By Trevor Parry-Giles, Ph.D.



Lin-Manuel Miranda, creator and star of the Broadway musical, *Hamilton*.

Something remarkable happened on Thursday, June 28, 2016, when Hillary Clinton accepted the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Near the culmination of the speech, Secretary Clinton said this: "Though 'we may not live to see the glory,' as the song from the musical *Hamilton* goes, 'let us gladly join the fight.' Let our legacy be about 'planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.'" For the first time in recent political memory, and possibly for the first time in American history, the presidential nominee of a major political party cited the lyrics from a Broadway musical as she sought to secure the votes of her fellow citizens for the highest office in the land.

Clinton's use of *Hamilton* speaks powerfully to the close relationship, the fused dynamics, of popular culture and presidential politics in the United States. This connection, moreover, is magnified during an election year, as candidates appear in pop culture forums (on *Ellen*, or on late-night comedy programs) to validate their approachability and increase their palatability, and as pop culture makes use of politics and politicians in



The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation's "Freedom Changed The World" float depicts President Reagan's transition from Hollywood to the White House at the 122nd Rose Parade.

its plotlines, comedy skits, and stand-up routines. From fine art to performing arts, across an array of media, the intermingling of pop culture and electoral politics is thorough in contemporary political culture and is an important area of inquiry for Political Communication scholars and students.

Particularly at election time, Political Communication scholars and students ask how politicians and political parties make use of the grammars and rhetorics of pop culture in their campaign communication. We also wonder how pop culture draws upon political themes and characters to entertain audiences and improve ratings. In the end, we also ponder why all of this matters—does pop culture have any political impact or effect at all?

## FROM POP CULTURE TO POLITICS

In her book, *Showbiz Politics*, historian Kathryn Cramer Brownell reveals that "entertainment became integral to political communication" during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when politics was infused with and altered by the newly emerging rhetorics of advertising/

public relations and new forms of entertainment. The outcomes of that relationship are profound.

One such outcome has been the steady stream of political leaders who have emerged from the entertainment industry. For most of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, political leadership came from conventional sources—most presidents and members of Congress were lawyers or soldiers. A few were farmers or businesspeople, but none were actors or performers or even writers. In fact, it's probably true that the actor with the greatest impact on 19<sup>th</sup> century politics was John Wilkes Booth!

As the entertainment industry expanded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the interplay between politics and pop culture began to intensify. More and more entertainers and producers recognized the possibility of political careers. Song-and-dance performer, actor, and president of the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG) George Murphy was sent to the U.S. Senate from California in 1965; one of his successors at SAG, Ronald Reagan, would become the governor of California in 1966 on his way to becoming the first actor-turned-president. Another California governor



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Instant name recognition, performance skills, and a facility with the mass media all serve to position actors and other performers for success in politics.

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capitalized on his film star fame to vault into politics in 2003, when Arnold Schwarzenegger was sent to Sacramento following the recall of Gray Davis. Not surprisingly, California has seen many political leaders come to politics from the entertainment industry—from Clint Eastwood, who became mayor of Carmel, to Sonny Bono, who was elected to Congress, to Shirley Temple Black, who was appointed an ambassador.



Arnold Schwarzenegger at the *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* Game Launch party held at the Raleigh Studios in Los Angeles.

It's actually not all that startling that entertainment professionals do well in politics. Instant name recognition, performance skills, and a facility with the mass media all serve to position actors and other performers for success in politics. When *The Love Boat's* chief purser, Gopher Smith (Fred Grandy), asked the voters of Iowa to send him to Congress, he didn't need to establish a persona or an identity—his name recognition was already quite high. When *Saturday Night Live's* Stuart Smiley (Al Franken) asked the voters of Minnesota to elect him to the U.S. Senate, he already manifested the performance skills (speaking, talking to the camera, etc.) necessary to succeed in politics. While these public servants needed to demonstrate their understanding and engagement with important public policy issues, they started well ahead of the political game because of their wide pop culture exposure.

The ability to translate performance, media skills, and name recognition to politics is once again being tested in Campaign 2016, because the Republicans have done it again. The grand old party of Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan has turned to the entertainment industry for its political leadership, drafting businessman and former reality television star Donald J. Trump as its presidential nominee. To be sure, Trump brought with him strong media relations skills, a well-established, widely recognized name, and an ability to speak well in public. Indeed, comparisons between Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan are frequent, often coming from Trump surrogates. Of course, the wisdom of the GOP's choice remains to be seen; one thing is certain, though: Trump's candidacy is yet another test of the proposition that pop culture notoriety and skill translates well to political leadership and electoral success.

#### FROM POLITICS TO POP CULTURE

Once they have achieved success in politics, pop culture celebrities generally don't go back to acting and performing. Arnold Schwarzenegger (with his return to the big screen

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Films, plays, and television programs often employ politics as a central setting for the drama or comedy presented.

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in such notable classics as *Terminator: Genisys* and *The Expendables* series) notwithstanding, most political leaders who come from pop culture stick with politics. But pop culture has always drawn on politics as a plot device, setting, or theme.

Even the ancient Athenian playwright, Aristophanes, frequently used his comedies to publicly condemn and ridicule political leaders, particularly the Athenian general and political leader Cleon, who Aristophanes depicted as a demagogue and a danger to the polis. Centuries later, many of Shakespeare's plays retold the political and military history of Britain, especially in the plays tracing the monarchies of Lancaster, York, and Tudor kings. Shakespeare even extended the reach of his political dramas to medieval Scotland, ancient Rome, and contemporary Denmark; many of his famous plays confronted specifically political matters, from *Macbeth* to *Antony and Cleopatra* to *Hamlet*.

Contemporary entertainment is similarly suffused with political themes and characters, as today's films, plays, and television programs often employ politics as a central setting for the drama or comedy presented. Fictional renditions of politics, such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *All the King's Men*, and *The Manchurian Candidate*, are among some of Hollywood's classics. Often, such fiction involves depictions of U.S. presidents, with the 1990s standing out as a particularly rich decade for fictional presidents. Many of these fictional presidents presented easy, idealized archetypes of presidential leadership. *Dave* (played by Kevin Kline as an impersonator who stands-in for an ill president) was a moral, honest, good-hearted president, while James Marshall (played by Harrison Ford) was the perfect action hero president in Wolfgang Peterson's *Air Force One*. (Incidentally, after he was asked to not use Queen's "We Are the Champions" to herald his entrances at the Republican National Convention in 2016, GOP nominee Donald Trump opted instead for the theme music from *Air Force One* when he took the podium to deliver his



Harrison Ford at the world premiere of *Air Force One* in Los Angeles. He stars as a U.S. President who is kidnapped on board *Air Force One*.

acceptance address.) Rob Reiner's *The American President* offered moviegoers an epitomized romantic "leading man" president in Andrew Shepherd (played by Michael Douglas), and Morgan Freeman's soothing, competent Tom Beck was a presidential comfort to a planet facing annihilation from a huge asteroid careening toward Earth in *Deep Impact*. The decade, then, saw a major increase in the number of films with fictional presidents over the two prior decades, and many of those presidents offered straightforward, easily understood visions of the American presidency.

While Hollywood is adept at creating fictional presidents and political leaders, its screenwriters and directors also tell the stories of actual presidents in fictionalized biopics. Hollywood focuses on the famous, the controversial, and the recent presidents for their fictionalizations. Alexander Knox, for example, earned an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Woodrow Wilson in the 1944 biopic *Wilson*. Even though it was a dud at the box office, *Wilson* garnered six Academy Awards and heralded a developing genre of filmic adaptations of presidents. Presidents aren't simply characters operating within a larger context in these films—they are the center of the films' plots. FDR's battle with polio was chronicled in 1960's *Sunrise at Campobello*, while JFK's struggles during World War II were the subject of the 1963 biopic *PT-109*. Director and provocateur Oliver Stone dissected the Kennedy assassination in *JFK* (though not really a

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As with all things political and rhetorical, finding specific causal effects is probably impossible. Instead, we speak of correlational or constitutive effects that place the pop culture texts within a large, evolving, and changing political culture.

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biopic) and also explored the more unsavory personality traits of Richard Nixon in 1995's *Nixon* and George W. Bush in 2008's *W*. Most famous of all, perhaps, is Steven Spielberg's depiction of Abraham Lincoln's struggle to pass the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 2012's *Lincoln*.

Operating alongside all of these dramas and renditions of presidential leadership are the parodies of politics and politicians that litter the airwaves, especially during presidential election seasons. Political satire has a long history across all civilizations and communities; in the U.S., such satire has truly blossomed with the advent of mass communication. In 1928, the great cowboy satirist Will Rogers impersonated President Calvin Coolidge on the radio. So great was the outrage that Rogers was forced to apologize to the president directly. By the 1960s, such satire was common, and Vaughn Meador was forging a very successful career impersonating the popular John F. Kennedy until JFK's tragic assassination made such satire inappropriate. Rich Little crafted his stand-up comedy career, in many ways, from the spot-on impressions he offered, particularly those of Richard Nixon.

By the mid-1970s, *Saturday Night Live's* repertoire included a series of comedic political impersonations and caricatures. Starting with Chevy Chase's version of a bumbling President Gerald R. Ford, countless *SNL* skits have poked fun at the neologisms and awkward phraseologies of George H.W. Bush, the peccadilloes of Bill Clinton, and the oddities of George W. Bush. Arguably, *SNL* fully hit its stride in terms of political satire with the 2008 election, with its clever and reflective send-ups of Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and most notably, Sarah Palin. *SNL's* success with political comedy

coincided with a host of similar satirical programs, from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to *Real Time with Bill Maher* and *Late Week Tonight with John Oliver*.

#### TO WHAT EFFECT?

In 2016, *SNL's* sketches featuring Larry David portraying Senator Bernie Sanders were widely seen as amongst the more successful of the program's satires. Perhaps this success was because of David's uncanny resemblance to Sanders, or the fact that Sanders reacted so good-naturedly to the caricature. Audiences and critics were sold on the humor and insight that *SNL* provided about the unfolding Democratic presidential primary.

In the end, though, were voters swayed by David's depiction of Sanders? Did it make them more or less likely to vote for Bernie, or even to "feel the Bern" in a different way or with a different intensity? And what about all the celebrities at the national conventions—what impact do Scott Baio (Chachi) or Anthony Sabato, Jr., or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar have on the voting public? What do we know about the value or relevance of fictional depictions of presidents on how the public views the U.S. presidency? Does it make any difference, for example, that some Hollywood presidents are now women, or people of color?

As with all things political and rhetorical, finding specific causal effects is probably impossible. Instead, we speak of correlational or constitutive effects that place the pop culture texts within a large, evolving, and changing political culture. So, in their investigation of 2008's "Fey Effect" (many assumed that Tina Fey's *SNL* impersonations of GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin were negatively affecting her public image), scholars Sara Ersalew and Dannagal Young found that young people were primed

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Pop culture serves the valuable and centrally important role of questioning and challenging, of asking voters to see politics and politicians differently.

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to think about certain traits in Sarah Palin based on their exposure to the *SNL* skits. Similarly, Lance Holbert and his colleagues demonstrated that viewing TV's *The West Wing* primed their college student subjects to see the presidency in general, and Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton specifically, in a more positive light. At best, all studies like this demonstrate is that rhetorics and discourses such as *SNL* enter into the large stream of political talk in a given campaign or at any given political moment; they can't ever be said to determine or even influence a particular political outcome. It probably would be a mistake to ascribe to any text—a speech, a debate, a television program, or an impersonation—the persuasive power to alter a political outcome.



TREVOR PARRY-GILES is Director of Academic & Professional Affairs (and Interim Executive Director) at the National Communication Association and Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. Parry-Giles studies rhetoric and political/legal culture. He is the co-author of *The Prime-Time Presidency: The West Wing and U.S. Nationalism and Constructing Clinton: Hyperreality and Presidential Image-Making in Postmodern Politics*. Parry-Giles is also the author of *The Character of Justice: Rhetoric, Law, and Politics in the Supreme Court Confirmation Process*. His research has appeared in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech, Rhetoric & Public Affairs, Presidential Studies Quarterly, Celebrity Studies, Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, and elsewhere.



Tina Fey attends the 60th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards in Los Angeles in 2008. Fey famously impersonated Sarah Palin on *Saturday Night Live*.

Thus, it is unlikely that Chachi's appearance at the RNC will yield an electoral triumph for Donald Trump in November, just as Larry David's uncanny sense of Bernie Sanders probably did little to damage or enhance the Vermont senator's prospects in the Democratic primary. Much more ephemerally, though, and certainly more ethereally, pop culture serves the valuable and centrally important role of questioning and challenging, of asking voters to see politics and politicians differently, of inviting new and different voices into the political dialogue, and, of suggesting new and provocative ways for citizens to reach the political judgments that are expected of them in a fully functioning, thriving democracy. ■



**The Pennsylvania State University**

*Assistant or Associate Professor in Communication Arts and Sciences—Rhetoric/Associate Director of the Center for Humanities and Information*  
PSU Job #64419

The Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University seeks to hire a tenure-track or tenured Assistant or Associate Professor whose scholarship emphasizes the study of rhetoric and information. We welcome applicants whose work features innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to rhetoric and information, whether theoretical, critical, or historical in nature.

This position consists of a 75 percent appointment as a Communication Arts and Sciences faculty member and a 25 percent appointment as Associate Director of the Center for Humanities and Information. The center supports research on: 1) theoretical, critical, and historical approaches to information, including its generation, organization, dissemination, and preservation; and 2) the impact of information technologies on the humanities.

The successful candidate will, in addition to conducting research and teaching in Communication Arts and Sciences, participate in the intellectual life of the Center for Humanities and Information and contribute to its growth.

The successful applicant will have a demonstrated record of scholarly achievement, be well-grounded in the discipline, complement and strengthen core interests of faculty in the department, and be willing to collaborate with the broader university community, especially in his or her role as Associate Director of the Center for Humanities and Information.

Candidates should provide clear evidence of scholarly and teaching excellence, and service to the discipline. In addition to conducting research and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, responsibilities include course development in the area of specialty, supervision of theses and dissertations, and involvement in other departmental activities. Additional considerations in reviewing candidates include interest in grant-based research, the desire to engage in interdisciplinary research, and an appreciation for working alongside diverse colleagues in both the humanities and the social sciences.

Applications must include a letter of application describing research, teaching, and any graduate mentoring experience, along with a CV, representative publications, a brief teaching portfolio, and the names of three references who may be contacted to provide letters of recommendation. Inquiries may be sent to Associate Professor Bradford Vivian, chair of the search committee, at [bjv113@psu.edu](mailto:bjv113@psu.edu). Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. The start date for the position is August, 2017. Apply online at <https://psu.jobs/job/64419>.

CAMPUS SECURITY CRIME STATISTICS: For more about safety at Penn State, and to review the Annual Security Report, which contains information about crime statistics and other safety and security matters, please go to <http://www.police.psu.edu/clery/>, which will also provide you with details on how to request a hard copy of the Annual Security Report.

Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all

qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or protected veteran status.

This institution does not offer domestic partner benefits.

This institution offers benefits to spouses.

**San Diego State University**

*Assistant Professor of Organizational Communication*

The School of Communication at San Diego State University invites applications for a tenure-track faculty position in Organizational Communication at the rank of Assistant Professor, to begin in Fall 2017. The selected candidate will be primarily responsible for teaching courses in Organization Communication at the undergraduate and graduate level. The ability to teach additional courses within the School of Communication, such as Interpersonal Communication, Performance Studies, Health Communication, or Ethnography, is preferred. Applicants from all research methodologies are encouraged to apply. Candidates should possess a demonstrated commitment to excellence in teaching and research. Evidence of, or the potential for, external funding is preferred but not required. A Ph.D. (or other doctoral degree) is required for appointment at the Assistant Professor level; a doctorate in Communication is preferred, although related degrees or areas of study will be considered. Salary is competitive and based on experience.

Interested candidates must apply via Interfolio at <https://apply.interfolio.com/36283>. Screening of applications will begin October 17, 2016 and continue until the position is filled.

Requests for additional information should be directed to:

George N. Dionisopoulos, Search Chair  
School of Communication  
San Diego State University  
5500 Campanile Drive  
San Diego, CA 92182-4560  
Email: [dionisop@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dionisop@mail.sdsu.edu)  
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**Seattle Pacific University**

*Assistant Professor of Communication*

Full-time, tenure-track, available in September 2017. Regular nine-month teaching load of about 33-35 quarter credits. The successful candidate will provide evidence of excellent teaching with undergraduate students and a sense of calling to Christian higher education. The teaching load will include Interpersonal Communication, Communication Theory, Public Speaking, and courses related to the applicant's area of specialization. Other duties include research and scholarly activity, student advising, and departmental and university committee assignments.

We are committed to diversifying our faculty and curriculum to serve our growing diverse population.

**Requirements:**

Ph.D. in Communication or related field. Evidence of teaching competence and scholarly activity required.

**Additional Information:**

Compensation commensurate with experience. Benefits include health, dental, disability, and life insurance, as well as retirement programs. A moving allowance is provided.

**Application Instructions:**

Completed applications will be reviewed beginning January 15, 2017. The online application includes an official SPU application form, a faith statement of approximately one page, and supporting documents. The University reserves the right to fill the position before the deadline or to extend the deadline as circumstances may warrant. For inquiries, please email the chair of the search committee below.

Dr. William M. Purcell  
Chair  
Department of Communication, Journalism, and Film  
Seattle Pacific University  
3307 3rd Avenue West, Suite 109  
Seattle, WA 98119  
(206) 281-2404  
[purcell@spu.edu](mailto:purcell@spu.edu)

This institution does not offer domestic partner benefits.

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**University of Central Florida—  
Nicholson School of Communication**

*Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor*

The Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida (UCF) is seeking two tenured or tenure-earning Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor positions in Strategic Communication (Crisis, Risk, and Health Communication) to begin Fall 2017. Appointment and compensation will be based on experience and academic success.

An earned doctorate in Communication or other related, relevant field from an accredited university by the start of employment; have an active program of social scientific scholarship appropriate for a research university; demonstrate motivational and strategies for pursuing external research funding; possess the capacity to teach at the doctoral or Master's degree level, including Strategic Communication courses; and possess relevant interaction with

professional areas of Risk, Crisis, or Health Communication. Preference is for candidates with an ability to contribute leadership to the advancement of a new doctoral program.

Apply online at <http://www.jobswithucf.com> and attach the following materials:

- Curriculum Vita (CV)
- Signed cover letter
- Maximum two-page statement outlining research vision and teaching interests
- List of three academic or professional references including address, phone number, and email address

Review of applications will begin in late Fall 2016 and will continue until the positions are filled.

The Nicholson School of Communication (NSC) strives to be a premier academic program known for excellence in research scholarship and education. Students are active in internships and organizations on and off campus. The curriculum emphasizes both applied and theoretical aspects of the field and encourages diversity in all aspects of communication. NSC offers five baccalaureates and a Master's degree and is developing a doctoral program that is anticipated to begin in 2019. For more information about the school and its program visit: <http://communication.cos.ucf.edu>.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is the nation's second-largest university, with more than 63,000 students. It has grown in size, quality, diversity, and reputation in its first 50 years. The university is classified as a "Doctoral University: Highest Research Activity" and a "Community Engagement" institution by the Carnegie Foundation. Today the university offers more than 200 degree programs including 84 Master's and 31 doctoral programs. UCF is an economic engine attracting and supporting industries vital to the region's future while providing students with real-world experiences that help them succeed after graduation. For more information, visit <http://www.ucf.edu>.

UCF is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All qualified applicants are encouraged to apply, including minorities, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. As a Florida public university, UCF makes all application materials and section procedures available to the public upon request.

This institution chooses not to disclose its domestic partner benefits policy.

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*“The College of  
Communication  
and the Arts is  
a place where  
theorists and  
practitioners  
create together.”*

*Dean Yates, M.F.A.*

Seton Hall University is pleased to announce that Deirdre Yates, M.F.A., has been appointed the Founding Dean of the College of Communication and the Arts, a premier choice for students seeking a high quality, interdisciplinary degree that is based in a sound liberal arts education. College programs embrace today's digital culture, and empower students to lead, create, and communicate with responsibility, passion and excellence. The college offers undergraduate majors in Communication, Visual and Sound Media, Art History, Public Relations, Journalism, Theatre, Art, Design and Interactive Multimedia, and Music. The Center for Graduate Studies houses M.A. Programs in Strategic Communication, Public Relations and Museum Professions.

Dean Yates is classically trained at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, as well as The Catholic University of America. A long-standing and highly respected member of Seton Hall's academic community, Dean Yates has received numerous awards, grants, and distinctions for her work in the arts, including two Inland Theatre League awards, a Gilbert V. Hartke award, and Lilly Grant funding to support the exploration of faith through the arts. In addition, Dean Yates has been honored by Seton Hall University on several occasions, having been a recipient of the University Humanitarian Award and having been chosen Woman of the Year in 2014.

Dean Yates is a very prominent member of the arts community. She has toured the country performing Shakespeare and appearing at regional theatres, has directed numerous local and regional productions, and has presented at several national conferences, primarily on the subject of women in the arts and academia. Currently, Dean Yates is a member of the Equity company, The Yates Musical Theatre for Children, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Celtic Theatre Company, the Board of Governors for the South Orange Performing Arts Center, and the Advisory Board for WSOU, Seton Hall's award-winning student-run radio station.

Dean Yates possesses an impressive vision for the future of the College of Communication and the Arts. Under her leadership, the college will continue to create innovative interdisciplinary programs for undergraduates. New and unique curricular programs are being implemented in the Center for Graduate Studies, with a PhD in Communication program on the horizon.



shu.edu/commarts 973-761-9474 commarts@shu.edu



# RECOGNIZING NCA's 2015-16 Annual Fund Donors

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and we look forward to honoring and thanking our  
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[shu.edu/commarts](http://shu.edu/commarts)  
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COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ARTS  
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