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## Campaigning and Governing: A Conspectus *Hugh Heclo*

This chapter addresses two questions in an attempt to provide a background for the studies that follow. Should anyone really care whether such a thing as “the permanent campaign” exists? Does it make any sense to invent yet another term to characterize our public affairs?

First, some very good reasons, indeed, exist to pay attention to the relationship—and the distinction—between campaigning and governing. If campaigning and governing are merging into one indiscriminate mass, we would do well to ask whether that means that something important is happening. The chapter goes on to consider a series of interrelated features of modern American politics. No one of them may be entirely new, but the pieces fit together to produce a new syndrome. No one planned such an emergent pattern in the general management of our public affairs, yet it now seems to lie at the heart of the way Americans do politics—or more accurately—the way politics is done to Americans at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Second, to speak of a permanent campaign seems as good a way as any other to identify that state of affairs.

### Prologue to the Endless Campaign

The term *permanent campaign* was first widely publicized early in the Reagan presidency by Sidney Blumenthal, a journalist who went

on to work in the Clinton White House—and then was caught up in the semipermanent campaign to impeach the president. Calling it “the political ideology of our age,” Blumenthal described the permanent campaign as a combination of image making and strategic calculation that turns governing into a perpetual campaign and “remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official’s popularity.”<sup>1</sup>

Others made similar observations, without using that exact term, before and after 1982. As the 1960 election approached, Samuel Grafton wrote in the *New York Times* about the troubling and growing reliance of politicians on the new public opinion polls. Grafton cited a worrisome curiosity: an “Eastern Senator [who] regularly has the voters in his state quizzed on a list of ten different public issues to find out which they react to most warmly. The Senator then becomes ‘hot’ about the issues he finds produce a temperature in the voters.” Grafton went on to point out the ominous similarity between that kind of so-called leadership and the way television was selecting its shows.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, Richard E. Neustadt published his landmark book *Presidential Power*.<sup>3</sup> Although more nuanced than most readers noticed, Neustadt’s study upset political science traditionalists, received widespread press attention for having John F. Kennedy’s ear, and taught several generations of students the message that “the power of the president is the power to persuade.”

Academic attention to the phenomenon of apparently endless campaigning gathered momentum in 1974 with the publication of David Mayhew’s influential study, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Mayhew argued that the key to Congress lay in understanding congressmen’s unremitting drive for reelection.<sup>4</sup> In retrospect, it is interesting that Mayhew’s study drew heavy criticism from other congressional experts for interpreting congressional behavior as little more than a collection of 435 individual permanent campaigns for reelection. The 1980s and 1990s brought new accounts of a “plebiscitary presidency” that depended on immediate public approval and a growing tendency for presidents to lead by “going public” with direct appeals to mass opinion.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, accounts by outsiders and insiders had become

dismal, indeed. In 1997 British political scientist Anthony King sought to figure out *Why America's Politicians Campaign Too Much and Govern Too Little*.<sup>6</sup> The following year, veteran Washington journalist Elizabeth Drew described *The Corruption of American Politics* in terms of the declining quality of politicians who operate in a debauched money culture of ruthless partisanship. Drew portrayed twenty-five years of change between the two impeachment trials of Nixon and Clinton:

The full time campaign at the presidential level—the elected President does not stop running, even as Clinton has demonstrated, after he has been reelected to a second term—has now been taken up by senators and representatives. . . . People tend to think that the politicians in Washington are “out of touch” with their constituents, but if they were any more in touch, their ears would never leave the ground. The politicians of today are, on the whole, a highly reactive breed . . . reflect[ing] the momentary mood of the public.<sup>7</sup>

Reflecting on that history, one senses that many elements of the permanent campaign began crystallizing amid the political career of Richard Nixon. The young congressman's election first to the House in 1946 and then to the Senate in 1950 offended many political observers, including old-line Republicans, with his campaigns' ruthless competitiveness and public relations mentality. But that was just the beginning. With Nixon's political resurrection in the latter 1960s, something like harmonic convergence seemed to occur: a sophisticated public relations onslaught to sell “the new Nixon”—unprecedented White House use of public opinion polling, political consultants and comprehensive media strategies, predatory fund-raising, and eventually a campaign against “enemies,” whom Nixon had always perceived to be no less endlessly campaigning against him.<sup>8</sup> Nixon the man was only a prodrome, however. Perhaps more than his ideas or personality, it was the contrived quality of Nixon's political appeal, his crafted ingratiation with Middle America that had long set teeth on edge in certain circles. To those who became known as Nixon haters, the man's whole political existence seemed a shabby and conniving permanent campaign.

Those brief observations imply one preliminary, important fact. Developments relevant to the permanent campaign are not limited

to a single political feature, institution, or presidential term. Indeed, we may not yet have experienced the full-blown phenomenon. Examining the Clinton presidency, political scientist Charles O. Jones suggests that the campaign style of governing by President Clinton, far from being a culmination, may represent just another step toward the abolition of any distinction between campaigning for election and governing in office. The very idea of a transition period between the two may be obsolete.<sup>9</sup>

A reasonable person may ask, So what if there is nothing to transition between? Should campaigning and governing not be two sides of the same coin and link electoral promises to government performance? Does this talk about a permanent campaign really matter?

#### Should Campaigning and Governing Differ?

In one sense—a promissory sense—it seems clear that campaigning and governing should have much in common. Any democratic political system is based on the idea that what happens in government is related to people's electoral choices. Elections and their attendant campaigns are not a thing apart from, but integral to, the larger scheme of democratic government, both in guiding responses to the past election and in anticipating reactions to the next. In the long run, without good-faith promise making in elections and promise keeping in government, representative democracy is unaccountable and eventually unsustainable.

Although the two necessarily relate to each other, good reasons exist to think that campaigning and governing ought not to be merged into one category. Common sense tells us that two different terms are necessary, because we know that promise making is not promise keeping, any more than effective courtship is the same thing as well-working marriage. A closer examination of the essential ideas behind campaigning and governing will show why our common-sense distinction makes very good sense in political affairs.

The modern concept of campaigning for public office is only a few centuries old and has a shady lineage at that. Anyone recalling the drunken brawls depicted in eighteenth-century Hogarth prints

will appreciate the low view of “vote canvassing” held by Anglo-American elites as representative democracy was being born. For educated gentlemen, overtly seeking popular support was not only unbecoming, it was thoroughly suspect. That disparaging view of what was later called “campaigning” expressed more than gentlemanly snobbery and moral self-righteousness. It dealt with what a classical education revealed to be literally a matter of life and death for any self-governing political community.

To be an educated person of the time was to be steeped in ancient Greek and Roman history and the timeless lessons about government that such history taught. Rhetoric was the classic art of persuasion, but it could be used for good or ill. Here, then, was the vital question posed by history and philosophy from the time of Plato onward: Was persuasion directed to the good of the political community—the operational definition of *virtue*—or to the personal benefit of the speaker who flattered his audience?<sup>10</sup> To that question history offered an answer. The telltale clue for deciding was self-seeking ambition—the restless virus that could spread the fatal disorder and set in motion the death cycle of republican self-government. Ambition inclined the self-seeker to tell the people what they wanted to hear—an act that nourished the people’s own selfish inclinations and produced more suitors for more short-sighted public favor. That led to mounting factional strife and loss of common purpose. From there, it was a short step to the eventual resolution of chaos by turning to dictatorship and tyranny.

Educated persons of the day knew that such a death cycle was the fate of all previous republics. If popular self-government was to have any chance of surviving, citizens had a vital obligation to recognize and desire true virtue in would-be leaders and to discern and defeat its counterfeit. On that score the differences between eighteenth-century “democrats” and their conservative opponents were not so great as imagined. The former invoked a natural aristocracy without regard to conditions of wealth, birth, or other accidental circumstances, and the latter defended the existing structure of rule by the rich, the well-born, and the able. For both, however, the point was that notables “stood” for office; they did not “run” after public favor but dutifully allowed their names to be put forward.<sup>11</sup>

Both sides took seriously Francis Bacon's warning that "nothing doth more hurt in a state than that cunning men pass for wise." Thus, on that deeper ground were archrivals Jefferson and Hamilton united in their hostility and contempt for a man like Aaron Burr, who in founding Tammany Hall discerned the future far better than they.

Actual practice, of course, often fell well short of that republican ideal, especially in frontier regions where social hierarchies were flattened and would-be "notables" were the butt of jokes. Seeking election to the first Congress in 1788—having been frozen out of a Senate seat by Patrick Henry's maneuverings—even James Madison had to drop his aloofness and quietly help marshal electoral support. But the fiction of the unambitious man of prominence who stood, rather than the flatterer who ran, was not mere cant, and it was influential for many years in America.<sup>12</sup> Fictions endure because they are signs pointing to what people regard as significant truths, markers not so much of description as of cultural aspiration. For a long time, respectable opinion remained distainful of the idea of a politician's strenuously seeking to persuade people to vote for him. Would someone whose character was not already known and who had to sell himself really be fit for public office? Should one entrust power to someone who courted public favor?

Scruples against campaigning died a lingering death during the nineteenth century, but they did die. The legitimization of campaigning depended heavily on legitimizing the idea of a loyal opposition. That meant understanding that there could be competitors for public office whose attempt to replace existing officeholders did not constitute seditious ambition—much less treason against the state. In the United States, the crucial election for establishing the legitimacy of such opposition and of related campaigning was the 1800 election that pitted Adams and the Federalists against the Jefferson and the Democratic Republicans.<sup>13</sup> From then on, the idea of nominating people to *campaign* for public office went hand in hand with the nineteenth-century growth of mass political parties to organize and profit from that process. Not coincidentally, *campaign* as a political term seems to have originated in nineteenth-century American party circles. Once the idea of opposition had been

housebroken, so to speak, it became safe to adopt imagery of warfare and to speak of parties' campaigns or of candidates' campaigning for office. The military analogy was apt. By the French term *campagne*, or open countryside and fields, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers on war meant the sustained series of operations an army would conduct when it left winter quarters and "took to the field" during the favorable summer weather. With the onset of winter, armies returned to quarters and waited to resume war during the next campaign season of active operations. So, too, political parties reposed in government office or in opposition; then, at election time, they "fielded" their candidates and undertook a series of engagements across the countryside in a campaign against the enemy. With the election battles decided, the parties returned to winter camp to wait to resume their war with the onset of the next campaign season.

While the designers of the U.S. Constitution had little use for parties and popular electioneering, the campaign analogy was not threatening in the nineteenth century, precisely because popular appeals had to be shaped to the constitutional system the framers had designed. On the one hand, it was a system brimming with elections—eventually hundreds for the federal House of Representatives, dozens in state legislatures for the Senate, and dozens more for the presidency (through the state electors), not to mention the thousands of elections for the state governments of the federal system. On the other hand, no one election or combination of elections was decisive. No election could trump any other as the one true voice of the people. The people, through elections shaped to the multiplex constitutional structure, were held at arm's length. Governing was what had to happen inside the intricately crafted structure of the Constitution. Every part of that structure derived its authority from—and was ultimately dependent on—the people. But the people never all spoke at the same time, and they never had residence in any one part or in the whole of the government quarters. Inside those quarters institutions were separated, and powers were shared, so that there would be a lot going on inside—a rich internal life to governing, a place of mutual accommodation and deliberation—if only because no one could do anything on his own,

although each could defend his own turf. The people were outside—in the open countryside to which their governors would have to come to give account of their stewardship.

The nineteenth century added the idea of parties' doing battle in the public countryside during the campaign season. That had not been part of the framers' vision, but it could not break their constitutional grip. Their whole constitutional system for representing people was nonsense unless one presupposed the distinction between campaigning and governing. For that distinction to break down and confound the Founding Fathers, something more than the introduction of mass political parties would have to occur. That "something more" has happened in our own time. But we should not get ahead of ourselves.

The point of this historical sketch is to recover notions of fundamental purpose, foundations that are easily forgotten, the farther we get from our political roots. Amid all the confusions and intellectual embellishments surrounding any subject, it can be clarifying to ask the childlike (but not childish) question, What is this for? With the growth of democratic politics over the past two hundred years, many theories have been spun out recommending what political campaigns should do. During the nineteenth century they sometimes held the vision of a moral crusade for the soul of the nation. Early in the twentieth century, Progressive reformers said a cleaned-up election process should bring forth the voice of informed citizens to produce efficient, good government—a marketplace of ideas where competing claims to truth would be tested. By the middle of the twentieth century, political scientists argued that campaigns should clarify choice and enforce accountability by responsible parties. "Issueless" politics with "me too" parties, it was said, should give way to electoral competition with sharp partisan differences among parties that could be held to account for their programs.

All those are perhaps valuable things for campaigns to do, but they are secondary purposes. The results an activity *might* achieve are not the same as what that activity is for. For example, however much a person might appreciate the tax advantages that come with buying a house, it would be a mistake to confuse tax advantages with the primary purpose for having housing—to provide comfort-



able and secure shelter. Or to take another example, the reason automakers produce cars is not to provide transportation. The purpose of making a car is to sell it. Transportation—having something to take one where he wants to go—is the main purpose for buying and driving a car. As Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations*, it is very beneficial that the purpose of the seller should mesh with the purpose of the buyer. Both parties then get what they want, and the larger society benefits as well. By definition, the purposes are not the same, and it takes thoughtful consideration to create an institutional framework that can facilitate their meshing. This focus on purpose should remind us of the central fact that campaigns are for persuading people to do something, usually to vote for X and not for Y. That, in essence, is what is happening when campaigning happens. In comparison with that purpose, everything else is incidental and secondary.

Similarly, we can think about governing in the light of essential purpose. Many things may or may not be happening when government happens. Multiple objectives always exist, and reasonable people will often disagree about how well any specific objective is being achieved. But not many reasonable observers would think that rule—which is to say political power institutionalized in government—should occur for only one particular objective, much less for its own sake. Then, for the sake of what is governing happening? The common-sense answer is that, behind all the many particular objectives, the essential purpose of governing is to get on with the business of the group being governed.<sup>14</sup> The ancient Greeks expressed that basic idea very well with their word for governing: *kybernan*, meaning “to steer.” That term for steering was then Latinized (*gubernare*) to give us the word govern, and in our own time the original word was readopted to designate the modern science of communication and control—cybernetics.

While references to the “ship of state” may seem a bit outdated, to think of governing in terms of the art of steering does make a good deal of sense. It does so because steering—the “cybernetic” combination of control and communication—is exactly what one generally expects to happen when governing is happening. In other words, governing is all about the interaction of information and

power exercised on behalf of some group of people as a going concern. The idea of steering encompasses as necessary properties both power—in the sense of controlling something—and of communication—in the sense of continuing exchanges of information. With communication but no power of control, there is no steering, but only a directionless exchange of information about one's drift. But neither is power alone sufficient for steering: The unidirectional message "full speed ahead" can hardly be called steering. Power without communication is the mindless directionality of pure will, oblivious to circumstances. To see governing as the art of steering is to summarize a wide variety of activities that it seems reasonable to expect should occur in the day-to-day governing of anything. People with governing authority are like a steersman in that they are normally expected to be guided not only by destinations on the future horizon but also by knowledge of past performance and present position. They should know about the condition and capabilities of the ship. They are expected to be aware of the surrounding features of the environment and alert to the portents that might be discerned from that environment. And they are expected to be around for the long haul. Nongoverning members of the group do not have their many hands on the wheel, but they are the paying passengers and ultimately they, not the steersman, are the ones best able to evaluate their conditions on the journey and to determine whether it is taking them where they want to go—hence, a powerful rationale for periodic elections and their accompanying campaigns.

All that discussion is a more elaborate way of repeating the initial idea that the essential purpose of governing is to get on with the business of the group being governed. One does not need to have the classical education or elite predispositions of the Founding Fathers to realize that to campaign and to govern are inherently different things. Of course, governing also has to do with persuading—"public information" officers were appearing in most federal departments by the 1950s<sup>15</sup>—but that is supposed to be in the service of getting the appropriate steering done. Likewise, campaigning also has to do with steering—or else there would not be so many high-paid campaign strategists and consultants—but that is in the service of getting the persuading done.

It is plausible, therefore, to think that a vital and irreducible difference exists between campaigning and governing, because their purposes have an inherent difference. In the nature of things, warriors and navigators do not have the same ends in view. It might become clearer why campaigning and governing should differ if we conclude this section by thinking about some generic points of contrast between the two. In at least three important ways campaigning and governing point in different directions—that is to say, not always in opposite but in sufficiently divergent directions to matter.

First, campaigning is geared to one unambiguous decision point in time. In other words, campaigning must necessarily focus on affecting a single decision that is itself the outcome, the event determining who wins and who loses. Governing, by contrast, has many interconnected points of outcome through time—the line decision, so to speak, of the “going concern.” Governing in that sense lacks singularity. Anyone who has worked in a political campaign will probably recall the initial enthusiasms of launching the campaign, the accelerating pace and growing intensity, the crashing climax of election day, and the eerie stillness of cleaning out the campaign offices in the period immediately following. Governing is different. It is a long persistence with no beginning or final decision point, something like a combination of digging a garden in hard ground and the labors of Sisyphus. The time scale for campaigning has historically been short and discontinuous, while that for governing stretches beyond the horizon.

Second, within its fixed time horizon, campaigning is necessarily adversarial. Nineteenth-century political writers borrowed the military metaphor precisely because it captures the essential idea of a contest to defeat one’s enemy. The competition is for a prize that cannot be shared, a zero-sum game. In comparison with a campaign, governing is predominantly collaborative rather than adversarial. While campaigning would willingly drown out its opponent to maximize persuasion, genuine governing wishes an orderly hearing of many sides, lest the steersman miss something important. In that sense, campaigning is self-centered, and governing is group-centered.

To be sure, governing is not without its competition and oppositions. As noted earlier, political parties have their historic roots in a

process of give-and-take that eventually legitimized the contest between the government and its loyal opposition. In a parliamentary democracy like Britain's, that tradition has been particularly strong, and in Washington's ideologically charged atmosphere of recent years, the partisan divisions between Democrats and Republicans in "government" and "opposition" have sharpened. Nonetheless, the governing process itself (and here we are speaking only of democracies) is necessarily collaborative in nature because no steersman has full power of controlling the enterprise. Since power and sure knowledge are rarely commensurate with steering responsibility, governing is a continuing invitation to consult, bargain, compromise, and renegotiate. Steering is not seeking a prize won against adversaries. It is puzzling out the course of action for a going concern, with everyone in the same boat.

In the third place, campaigning is inherently an exercise in persuasion. The point of it all is to create those impressions that will yield a favorable response for one's cause. In contrast, governing places its greatest weight on values of deliberation. While good campaigning often persuades by its assurance and assertions, good governing typically depends on a deeper and more mature consideration. This is so since whatever conclusions governing comes to will be backed by the fearsome power of the state. Taking counsel over what to do and how to do it lies at the heart of the governing process. Of course, it has to be acknowledged that *deliberation* may sound too genteel a term for the knife fights that are often associated with governing, especially along the banks of the Potomac. Nevertheless, the men and women governing public policy do make up a going concern as they bargain and seek to persuade each other inside the constitutional structure. The deliberation in view here means nothing more profound or high-minded than that.

Drawing such a contrast between persuasion and deliberation seems to stack the deck against campaigning as something undesirable. That would be a false impression. Campaigning has a legitimate place in democracy, but it is important to see that place for what it is. Crass as it may sound, campaigning is a matter of skill in making oneself attractive to others in such a way that they will yield. It is a sales job. The results may or may not be informative,

but the skillful campaigner need not explore the truth of things. Within the confines of a campaign setting, what is true is what pleases the audience.

Campaigns are not necessarily insincere. In fact, since sincerity is usually very hard to fake, successful campaigners are often the ones who most truly do believe in their causes. That is precisely the point, however: campaigns exist to prosecute a cause, not to deliberate courses of action. As Burdett Loomis puts it later in this volume, “A campaign is nothing if not a series of seductions” (p. 162). Good seducers believe in themselves.

Obviously “issues” and “debates” exist in modern political campaigns, but the overarching concern is to get oneself chosen by the hearers rather than to engage in a genuine give-and-take discussion. Campaigning is about talking to win, not to learn or to teach. Thus, campaign experts rightly tell their candidates to “stay on message”—that is, essentially to keep giving the same speech—rather than to engage with what an opponent might be saying. Likewise, in the contest for public approval, it is more effective to “frame” issues than to inform the audience about anything in detail. It is more persuasive to project self-assurance than to admit ignorance or uncertainty about devilishly complex issues. It is wiser to counterattack and switch the subject than to struggle with tough questions. Those and many other techniques of effective campaigning are essentially antideliberative.

One might object that, if not exactly deliberative, at least an argumentative quality is inherent in campaigning. Often, one draws a parallel between competitive elections and the clash of legal adversaries in a courtroom, with the voters as jury deciding the outcome. That analogy quickly breaks down, however, once we recall that the adversarial contest in court occurs under strict rules that are explicitly intended to maximize reasoned deliberation and to minimize “irrelevant” information or appeals to emotion. Hence, the outcomes of legal proceedings are termed judgments and verdicts, not preferences or vote results. The truer metaphor for campaigning is not the courtroom contest but a commercial sales campaign between competing companies. The participants are bidders for support, not adversaries in an argument deliberately regulated to

get at the truth. Hence, it is not surprising that the experts in modern campaigning emerged not from the legal fraternity but from the marketing and advertising professions of American business.

The foregoing comments should not be construed to say that campaigns are necessarily deceptive. If deception occurs, it is incidental to purpose, and no less incidental is any truth that may emerge from the same process. This is the reason that borrowing the military campaign metaphor in the nineteenth century was apposite. The essential purpose behind “taking to the field” is not necessarily to fight deceptively or honorably. It is not to weigh the relative merits of soldiers or strength of armies, or even to fight at all. The purpose is to defeat the enemy, and if that can occur without a fight, so much the better. What winning is to military campaigning, persuading is to political campaigning, namely, the essence of the purposive behavior by which one names the activity.

For the same reason, it is a mistake to conflate electoral campaigning with the classic image of a free marketplace of ideas. The notion of democracy embodying a science-like experimental method was popularized by John Dewey in the first half of the twentieth century and drew from a venerable argument for “the open society” that goes back at least 350 years to John Milton and the English Civil War.<sup>16</sup> According to that view, in a democratic society tolerant of diversity, truth claims are tested and error discovered through open debate. But when that expectation confronts actual election campaigns, the inevitable result is disillusionment. Political campaigning is certainly one part of the open society, but it is not so much the truth-testing marketplace of ideas as the alley where the most fervent rug salesmen compete for customers. Deliberation is what high-minded people hope will occur in the voters’ minds, but it is not what campaigns themselves try or expect to produce. The aim of campaigning is for the voter to make a psychological purchase. That purchase should not insult one’s reason, if reason were to be consulted, but the modern campaign’s real aim is to engage the consumer’s feelings in a preferred direction—in other words, not to win debates but to win the audience. Raymond Price summed up the essence of the difference between campaigning and deliberation in a landmark strategy memorandum written

for the 1967–1968 Nixon campaign. Pointing out that “the natural human use of reason is to support prejudices, not to arrive at opinions,” Price went on to describe credal facts of modern campaigning:

Let’s leave realities aside—because what we have to deal with now is not the facts of history, but an image of history. . . . *We have to be very clear on this point: that the response is to the image, not to the man*, since 99 percent of the voters have no contact with the man. It’s not what’s there that counts, it’s what’s projected—and, carrying it one step further, it’s not what *he* projects but rather what the voter receives. It’s not the man we have to change, but rather the *received impression*. And this impression often depends more on the medium and its use than it does on the candidate himself. Politics is much more emotional than it is rational. . . . [W]e have to bear constantly in mind that it’s not what we say that counts, but what the listener hears; not what we project, but how the viewer receives the impression.<sup>17</sup>

The essential issue, therefore, comes down to this. The more that campaigning infiltrates into governing, the more we may expect the values of a campaign perspective to overrule the values of a steersman perspective. Rather than maintaining a balance, it means shifting the weights on the scales of the public’s business from a longer to a shorter time horizon, from collaborative to adversarial mindsets, from deliberation and teaching to persuasion and selling. Those are serious shifts in the rules of the game for any self-governing people. They are especially serious for a people whose whole constitutional system of representation presupposes the distinction between campaigning and governing. How could that happen?

### Creating the Permanent Campaign

As noted at the outset, *permanent campaign* is shorthand for an emergent pattern of political management that the body politic did not plan, debate, or formally adopt. It is a work of inadvertence, something developed higgledy-piggledy since the middle of the twentieth century, much as political parties became part of America’s unwritten constitution in the nineteenth century. The permanent campaign comprises a complex mixture of politically sophisticated people, communication techniques, and organizations—profit and nonprofit alike. What ties the pieces together is the continuous and voracious quest for public approval. Elections themselves are only one part of the picture, where the focus is typ-

ically on personalities and the mass public. Less obvious are the thousands of orchestrated appeals that are constantly underway to build and maintain favor of the certain publics and targeted elites for one or another policy cause. Thus, while some of the endless appeals for public approval are quite direct, many others are so indirect that “the people” and their thinking are mere fodder for framing issues and controversies for elite consumption. People in government, interest groups at the fringes of government, and networks of collaboration and opposition stretching across both spheres are all part of the nonstop battle for public approval that now occurs throughout the political landscape. In that sense, the permanent campaign is everywhere, and it is nowhere in particular.

We should be careful not to confuse that particularly new aspect of our unwritten constitution with the more general need for public support that has always existed in all forms of government. Philosophers have long argued, with good cause, that the opinion of the governed is the real foundation of all government. David Hume put it this way:

As force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular. The Soldan of Egypt, or the Emperor of Rome, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination; but he must, at least, have led his mamelukes, or praetorian bands, like men, by their opinion.<sup>18</sup>

In that intellectual tradition, it is not simply the numerical force of the governed that makes government depend on opinion. Over 2000 years before Hume, Confucius taught that of the three things necessary for government, two—food and military defense—could be given up under duress, because “[f]rom of old, death has been the lot of all men. But a people that has no faith in their rulers is lost indeed.”

To the basic ingredients of obedience and trust, waves of democratization during the past two centuries have produced almost universal acceptance for the claim that the only legitimate government is that which is based on the will of the people.<sup>19</sup> It was such consent among equals that Tocqueville saw as being modeled first in



America and then destined to sweep over the world. Indeed, one could claim that the permanent campaign began with the first breath of life drawn by the new American republic. In 1775 the Continental Congress during its first hundred days not only organized the colonies for armed resistance. It also self-consciously produced nine major public addresses and organized a press campaign to win support for the American cause. Each address was carefully crafted paragraph by paragraph and “put to press and communicated as universally as possible,” using the precursor of the Post Office that Correspondence Committee chairman Benjamin Franklin was creating.<sup>20</sup> Once the Constitution was in place, policies of the new national government created an extended public sphere for mobilizing political opinion. Among those policies were mail subsidies for the cheap distribution of newspapers, fully nationalized mail routes, and an unprecedented commitment to the publication of government documents.

From those and many other examples, it would clearly be a mistake to think that the dependence of government on public opinion is anything new to government. But the permanent campaign is something different from government’s perennial need for public support. Every day is election day in the permanent campaign. Such campaigning is a nonstop process seeking to manipulate sources of public approval to engage in the act of governing itself. American governance enters the twenty-first century inundated with a campaign mentality and machinery to sell politicians, godly policies, and everything in between. Has something important happened? We might recall this chapter’s earlier reference to Sam Grafton, who in 1960 considered curious and noteworthy an eastern senator who polled constituents to guide his getting “hot” on certain issues. One is right to think that something important has intervened when, forty years later, another eastern senator famous for his insight retires with a valedictory on “How Polling Has Trampled the Constitution.”<sup>21</sup>

The permanent campaign can be described as our unwritten Anti-Constitution. The written Constitution would keep the citizenry at arm’s length from the governing process. The Anti-Constitution sees all efforts at deliberation outside the public eye as

conspiratorial. The Constitution would normally consider the people as a sum of localities linked to government through representatives who take counsel with each other. The Anti-Constitution sees a largely undifferentiated public where one representative is interchangeable with another so long as he or she takes instructions. The Constitution would submit the results of governing to the people at regular intervals in many different election venues. The Anti-Constitution prescribes instant responsiveness to the continuous monitoring of the people's mass opinion and mood.

Those generalizations about our written Constitution and unwritten Anti-Constitution may seem too extreme, and so they are if taken to be descriptive of any one moment in time. But that view of the unwritten Anti-Constitution is not excessively extreme if one is thinking in terms of timelines and trajectories. It is no exaggeration to think that over the course of time, the permanent campaign does point in a quite different direction from the long-standing vision of constitutional government. The central tendency of the permanent campaign, as it continues, is anticonstitutional. That trajectory is as much about the mentality as the machinery of modern politics.

The mentality involved touches on deep-seated cultural changes, a subject that would take us too far afield to fit into the confines of this chapter. Here, simply note that at the deepest level, cultural patterns underlying the endless campaign raise questions about how we understand the nature of reality and our place in the world. Is "truth" anything more in principle than what I, as well as people like me, can accept? Is public thinking anything more than the sending of messages by communities of interpretation? Is knowledge something that we construct or that we discover? Is man the measure of all things, or is he a participant in meanings far beyond himself? Obviously, those are not issues that we can pursue here.<sup>22</sup>

What we can identify and discuss without doing excessive injustice to the subject are the political instrumentalities that give expression to the deeper developments of political culture. Those features proved important in creating the permanent campaign, and one can conveniently group them into six categories. The point here is not to describe each in detail but to show the logic that has connected those emergent properties into a coherent pattern during

the past fifty or so years—the pattern of campaigning so as to govern and even governing so as to campaign.

**The Decline of Political Parties.** The first feature is a venerable concern of political scientists—the decline of political parties. That is a more complex subject than it first appears, since in some respects America's two national parties are stronger than they were fifty years ago. Where parties have become much weaker is at the level of political fundamentals—generating candidates for office and being able predictably to mobilize blocs of people to vote for them. The cumulative effect of many changes from the late nineteenth century onward—ending the “spoils” system in public employment, electoral reforms and party primaries, suburbanization, and television, to name a few examples—was largely to destroy the parties' control over recruitment and nomination of candidates for office. Concurrently, the general trend since the middle of the twentieth century has been a gradual decline in the strength of voters' identification with the two major parties. Much of that has to do with the replacement of the more party-oriented New Deal and World War II generation by the post–New Deal generations.<sup>23</sup> The twentieth-century change in American parties represents a general shift from party-centered to candidate-centered elections, in an “every man for himself” atmosphere.<sup>24</sup> Since politicians cannot count on loyalties from party organizations, voting blocs of the New Deal coalition, and individual voters, after the 1950s politicians have had every reason to try to become the hub of their own personal permanent campaign organizations. Typically, American politicians now rise or fall not as “party men” but as largely freewheeling political entrepreneurs.

Although much weaker on the recruitment side, political parties have also become stronger in other dimensions that intensify the permanent campaign. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, party coalitions grew more ideologically and socially distinctive. Simultaneously, the national party organizations' ability to raise and distribute money vastly increased. The central headquarters of each party also became more adept at constructing national election strategies and campaign messages to attack the other party. At the same time, two-party conflict in Congress became more

ideologically charged and personally hostile. With that development came congressional leaders' growing use of legislative campaign committees to raise money, set agendas, and define the party image. All that has provided the financial wherewithal and career interests for more sustained and polarized political warfare. In short, both where parties have become weaker and where they have become stronger, the effect has been to facilitate a climate of endless campaigning.

**Open Interest-Group Politics.** A second feature creating the permanent campaign is the rise of a much more open and extensive system of interest-group politics. "Opening up the system" became a dominant theme of American politics after the Eisenhower years. On the one hand, to open up the system meant that previously excluded Americans—minorities, women, youth, consumers, and environmentalists, for example—demanded a voice and place at the table. The civil rights movement was in the vanguard, followed by many others. With the politics of inclusion came more advocacy groups and a nurturing environment for that minority of Americans who were inclined to be political activists. On the other hand, opening up the system also meant exposing all aspects of the governing process to public view. In the name of good government and participatory democracy, barriers between policymakers and the people were dismantled. Open committee meetings, freedom-of-information laws, publicly recorded votes, televised debates, and disclosure and reporting requirements symbolized the new openness. The repeal of public privacy had a sharp edge. After Vietnam, Watergate, and other abuses of government power, deference to public officials became a thing of the past. Replacing that deference were investigative journalism and intense media competition for the latest exposé. People in public life became themselves the object of a new regime of strict ethics scrutiny and exposure—and thus tempting targets in a permanent campaign.

Often the two versions of openness—inclusion and access—were mutually reinforcing. Groups demanded new laws and procedures that would give them greater access to the policymaking system. Greater access to the policymaking system—administrative rule-making, standing to sue in courts, congressional committee hear-

ings, freedom-of-information claims, and so on—encouraged more groups to countermobilize and make their presence felt. With a host of political agendas in play and a declining ability of political parties to create and protect political careers, politicians as a whole became more subject to interest-group pressures and more obliged to engage in continuous campaigning. Then, too, the single-issue groups and social movements that became prominent after midcentury also provided a large pool of potential candidates who were likely to be more policy-oriented than the older breed of party politicians. Thus, the expanding sphere of interest-group politics provided more fuel for the permanent campaign in the form of people who saw campaigning with and against special-interest groups to be the heart of governing.

Here might be a good place to pause and observe some of the permanent campaign's emerging dynamics. While political parties were weakening as linking mechanisms between leaders and the grassroots, mobilized interest groups converged on an increasingly open policymaking system. Politicians' careers became more individually constructed, and governing coalitions became more diffuse and difficult to sustain. Party stalwarts and establishment notables faded into history, while advocacy groups and activists with an agenda crowded onto the public stage. On all sides of the scramble, incentives were growing to turn to the onlooking public and its presumptive opinion for support and bargaining strength in governing. Contrariwise, "moves" and "messages" deployed in governing could be used to shape public reactions in the process of campaigning against opponents. Increasingly, the use and manipulation of public opinion were the politicians' means to get their way. But how could that be done in a mass democracy?

**New Communications Technology.** A third feature is the new communications technology of modern politics. The rise of television after the 1940s was obviously an important breakthrough in personalizing direct communication from politicians and interest groups to a mass public. Candidates for office could move from retailing their appeals through party organizations to direct wholesaling with the voting public. Likewise, groups could use protests

and other attention-grabbing media events to communicate their causes directly to a mass audience. For both politicians and advocacy groups, communication with the public bypassed intermediaries in the traditional three-tiered “federal” structure of party and interest-group organizations, where local, state, and national commitments complemented each other. In place of the traditional structure could grow something like a millipede model—direct communication between a central body and mass membership legs. Of course, the story did not stop with broadcast television but went on to include cable TV, talk radio, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, “narrowcasting” to target audiences, and the Internet. Explosive growth in the electronic media’s role in Americans’ lives provided unfathomed opportunities to crossbreed would-be campaigners and governors.

Quite apart from its use by politicians and interest groups, the new communications technology had its own powerful reasons to present its expanding audiences with the picture of governing as little more than a continuous process of campaigning. Openness offered ever more information to report, and the expanding market of media consumers intensified competition for public exposure. Given the media’s need to attract and hold the attention of a largely passive audience, communication of just any kind would not do. As Walter Lippmann saw in analyzing the popular print media in the early twentieth century, communication must be of a kind that translates into audience shares and advertising dollars. That has meant playing up story lines that possess qualities of dramatic conflict, human interest, immediacy, and strong emotional value. The easiest way for the media to meet such needs has been to frame the realities of governing in terms of political contests. The political-contest story about government makes complex policy issues more understandable, even if the “understanding” is false. It grabs attention with short and punchy dramas of human conflict. It has the immediacy of a horse race and a satisfying resolution of uncertainty by naming winners and losers. In addition, of course, it does much to blur any sense of distinction between campaigning and governing.

Even if the participants themselves do not frame their activities as

a political contest, media figures—the new intermediaries in politics—can show that they are too savvy to be taken in. Unmasking the “real” meaning of events, reporters reveal the attempts of one side or another to gain political advantage over its rivals in the governing process. Translating the campaign “spin” and finding the “hidden agenda” can be Everyman’s badge of political sophistication in the modern media culture.

Again, if we pause to take stock, what we are watching is not simply the development of a technological marvel of mass communication over the past half-century. We are watching a media system that shapes a public mind that is primed to be ministered to by the permanent campaign. Of course, most of us have a significantly limited attention span and an inclination to prefer dramatic entertainment over complex matters of substance. Modern communication technology allows those individual proclivities to be recast into patterns of public thinking at a mass social level.

**New Political Technologies.** The fourth feature underlying creation of the permanent campaign is what we might call new political technologies. At the same time as changes in parties, interest groups, and electronic media were occurring, the twin techniques of public relations and polling were invented and applied with ever growing professional skill in the public arena. Together, they spawned an immense industry for studying, manufacturing, organizing, and manipulating public voices in support of candidates and causes. The cumulative result was to impart a much more calculated and contrived quality to the whole political process than anything that prevailed even as recently as the 1950s.

When professional public relations began its break from turn-of-the-century press hacks and publicity stuntmen, it did so in the public sector. The profession’s origins lay in the federal government’s propaganda offices during World War I. A number of veterans from those public information campaigns went on to found businesses that began turning “counsel on public relations” into a distinct and well-paid profession. The young industry catered mainly to businesses, and it was not until the mid-1930s that corporate America in general embraced the new public relations services as a

way to restore its Great Depression– and New Deal–battered image with the public.<sup>25</sup> The effort of business to sell itself, and not just its products, had begun in earnest. Effective public relations reached beyond marketing and advertising; soon it was seen to require strategies that could fundamentally change a business client's practices and policies. By the middle of the twentieth century, the PR man had gained the keys to the executive washroom, and it was roughly at that time that politicians and the new profession began discovering each other. The permanent campaign was about to move from the private to the public sector.

At this point, the story of public opinion polls intervenes. Political polling had its own roots in nineteenth-century straw votes and newspaper ballots, and the later addition of mail questionnaires and then magazine-sponsored telephone surveys did little to improve polls' reliability. It was only in the late 1930s that former newspapermen George Gallup and Elmo Roper pioneered the use of statistical sampling to produce representative surveys of public opinion. The polling industry grew rapidly after the Second World War and found its services in demand by two types of clients. First and most obvious were the media, beginning with print journalism and then vastly expanded by the growing electronic media after the 1950s. By the 1970s Americans were routinely hearing the results of polls sponsored by major media outlets that typically described the popularity of particular viewpoints and personalities as well as dramatic horse-race accounts of elections or, rather, election predictions. Reporting to Americans what they themselves thought turned out to be a popular and readily available source of created news. While seeking to generate news stories by announcing their results, such polls have added little to understanding the complexities of public opinion. Yet they are important to our subject. The media's pervasive polling and financial stake in publicizing the results helped teach Americans of the late twentieth century to read their society as a continuously contested battleground for public opinion.

The second type of client for the new, statistically designed polls was less noticeable to the man on the street. It was the growing industry of public relations consultants. Even more than the media



would need polls, pollsters and public relations people needed each other. Elmo Roper described the development to his firm's interviewers in 1949:

Corporations have become increasingly concerned about their standing in the eyes of the public. . . . The "public relations counsel," who is the expert in advising companies how to act so as to deserve the public's confidence, needs some facts to go on. He needs to know *how* his client does stand with the people and *why* that standing is good or bad. He needs to know what people want and expect from business enterprises beyond good products and values. Public relations research tries to get the answers to those questions.<sup>26</sup>

Those were exactly the kinds of concerns that politicians and interest groups were ready to hear when they started making significant use of the services of opinion-research and public-relations firms after the middle of the twentieth century. The first collaborations were a simple technology transfer from advertising campaigns for consumer products to the marketing of candidates and political causes. As earlier with business clients, however, it soon came about that public relations professionals claimed a strategic view that could affect the practices and policies the client might want to put forward.<sup>27</sup> Over time, consultants and pollsters moved into the political front office. After the 1960s, increasingly specialized political consultant services developed and were fortified by professional polling to cover every imaginable point of contact among politicians, interest groups, and the people being governed. The basic features of the political marketing landscape include the following services: poll and focus-group research, strategic planning, image management, direct-mail marketing, event management, production of media materials, "media buys," opposition research against competitors, and orchestration of "grassroots" citizen campaigns.

Pausing again, one can appreciate the conjuncture of those powerful forces. With the third and fourth features came the technical capability to engage in a kind of politics that would have been unthinkable in the first half of the twentieth century. From small and disparate beginnings, the three great technologies—electronic media, polling, and public relations—converged into immense and mutually supportive industries. For politicians and group activists, they opened the door of opportunity to orchestrate, amplify, and

inject the presumptive voices of the American people—that is, “our people”—into the daily management of public affairs. All those trends have made it increasingly possible for politicians and other would-be leaders to know about the public without having any real human relationship with the people in particular. Haltingly at first, and then with much gusto after the 1960s, America stepped through that door into the permanent campaign.

**Need for Political Money.** The fifth factor in the creation of the permanent campaign amounts to a logical consequence of everything else that was happening. It is the ever growing need for political money. It turns out that most of what political marketing does resolves into spending money on itself—the consultants—and the media. Hence, after the 1960s, an immense new demand grew for politicians and groups to engage in nonstop fund-raising. Even if the people managing the new technologies—media, polling, and public relations—were not in profit-oriented businesses, the new forms of crafted politics would have cost huge amounts of money to create and distribute. As it was, the splendid profits to be made helped add to even larger political billings. For example, in 1994 the fifteen most expensive Senate campaigns in the United States devoted almost three-quarters of their funds to consultants’ services.<sup>28</sup>

Legislative reforms in the 1970s aimed to control election contributions but actually had the effect of enhancing the role and costs of political consultants. Now added to the scene were specialists who could master the technical requirements of the law and the fund-raising techniques for extracting large sums in small amounts from many like-minded donors. In 1976 the Supreme Court ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* determined that political spending was deserving of all the constitutional protections of individual free speech. That ruling guaranteed that the money wells could be drilled ever deeper to nourish the permanent campaign into the foreseeable future. Those with the right skills and mailing lists could design legal channels through the reefs of rules and regulations for virtually any money anyone wanted to put into the permanent campaign. The government steering metaphor took on a new aspect.

To tap into dependable streams of political money, political con-

sultants and operatives now became adept at tailoring a never ending campaign to subgroups of the population with distinctive demographic profiles. In terms of actually mobilizing people in politics, the new impetus was to hunt out support—concentrating resources to search for narrowly targeted groups of predisposed sympathizers—rather than to gather support within general coalitions. Thus, modern technology allowed “list vendors” to assemble computer-generated files of potential supporters who had been profiled by their consumption and other characteristics. From such lists, “personalized” mailings and other direct contacts to raise funds were organized. The responses to those contacts could, in turn, serve as the databases to mobilize periodic grassroots letter-writing and call-in campaigns on special issues. Of course, all those activities called for spending more money to facilitate yet more fund-raising.

**Stakes Involved in Activist Government.** To close the circle of forces behind the permanent campaign, we need to revisit the obvious. Granted a massive and growing need for more political money exists. But why should anyone pony up the money? What we might easily overlook is the obvious point that the permanent campaign exists because there is something big and enduring to fight about. The stakes involved in activist government are what make it worthwhile to pay out the money that keeps the permanent campaign going and growing. At the simplest level, one might call that the Microsoft effect. Only after Bill Gates found that the federal government had an Antitrust Division did Microsoft lobbyists and contributions to both parties begin appearing to demonstrate the company’s commitment to civic education and participation.

If the federal government were as small a part of people’s lives and of the economy as it was during the first half of the twentieth century, we can be sure that there would be far less interest in the continual struggle to influence the creation, administration, and revision of government policies. Campaigning has become big and permanent because government has become big and permanent. One is speaking here of more than the obvious benefits to be derived from influencing spending and taxation, although with the federal budget approaching \$2 trillion, that is not a small consider-

ation. It is not even a matter of the federal government's growing regulatory power over society and the economy. The deeper reality is a pervasive presence of public policy expectations. That is another factor that changed greatly after the Eisenhower years and helped give birth to the permanent campaign.

To say it another way, conceptions of who we are as a people became increasingly translated into arguments about what Washington should do or should stop doing. Abortion is an obvious example, but to see the point more fully one need only to consider Americans' thinking about race, the role of women, crime, religious issues, economic security, education, or people's relation to the natural environment. Emblematic of that trend, both academics and the public after the 1950s began to make unprecedented use of the term *policy* as a category for understanding their society. Writing as domestic policy adviser in 1970 to the newly elected President Nixon, Daniel Patrick Moynihan pointed out that the very way of thinking about government was changing in *postindustrial* society—then a newly minted term. “We are moving from program to policy-oriented government,” he wrote.<sup>29</sup> Programs—government officials' traditional focus—were all about delimited activities authorized by statute; they were “inputs.” Policy, on the other hand, aims to guide government in accordance with the properties of a “system,” which is to say a vast, interconnected body where “everything relates to everything” with frequently counterintuitive results; policy is about “outputs.”

The challenge created by that changing perception of government and the body politic was only beginning to dawn on people at the end of the 1960s. If what government does is policy, and if everything relates to everything else, and if whatever ends up happening is output—then policy is without borders, and everyone always has an open invitation to see government as responsible for whatever goes wrong. In words that explain much about the impetus behind permanent campaigning, Moynihan concluded, “It follows that there is no significant aspect of national life about which there is not likely to be a rather significant national policy. It may be a *hidden* policy. . . . But it is policy withal.” Here, indeed, was promising territory in which the permanent campaign could take to the field.

Everything was political and poised to break forth into a policy dispute before the national public, from endangered species in the swamps to sexual innuendo in the workplace. Moynihan was simply expressing a policy mentality that shaped expectations of policymakers and public alike for the permanent campaign. “The movement away from program-oriented government toward policy orientedness . . . may be likened to a change in sensibility in cultural matters,” he said. And so it was.

Those six features have seemed to take us far afield. The point has been to try to connect the dots so that we might see that what seem to be many things are actually the one thing we are calling the permanent campaign. By giving scant attention to the changing American culture, we have probably not come close to identifying the ultimate causes of the subject in view. Nevertheless, perhaps enough has been said to indicate that the causes must be deep-seated and independent of any passing personality—although the Clinton presidency surely did more than its share to spur on the permanent campaign.

The campaign without end is not a story of evil people’s planning and carrying out nasty designs on the rest of us. Rather, it is more like a story of things all of us would do, given the incentives and what it takes to win under changing circumstances. The story’s central narrative is the merger of power-as-persuasion inside Washington with power-as-public-opinion manipulation outside Washington. The two, inside and outside, governing and campaigning, become all but indistinguishable—as they now are in any one of the big-box lobbying or consulting firms in Washington. The paradox is that a politics that costs so much should make our political life feel so cheapened.

#### Concluding Unscientific Postscript

We might recall that the second paragraph of this chapter had to correct itself. The permanent campaign is not the way Americans do politics, but the way politics is done to them. Without calling it by that name, the way most Americans do politics is by not doing what they consider “political” but by engaging in a myriad of local volunteer activities—politics in particular.<sup>30</sup> That is all to the good and

worth remembering. But it is also true to say that the handiwork of professional consultant-crafted politics is now probably the only version of nonlocal politics that the average American ever experiences.

The pervasiveness of political marketing means that all national politics take place in a context of permanent, professionally managed, and adversarial campaigning to win the support of those publics upon whom the survival of the political client depends. Into the media are poured massive doses of what historian Daniel Boorstin discerned in the 1960 birth of TV politics and called pseudoevents.<sup>31</sup> They are not spontaneous, real events but orchestrated happenings that occur because someone has planned, incited, or otherwise brought them into being for the purpose of being observed and swaying opinion. Leaks, interviews, trial balloons, reaction stories, and staged appearances and confrontations are obvious examples that most of us hardly recognize as “pseudo” anymore. It is difficult to know anything about national affairs that is not subject to the ulterior motives of professionals in political management or in the media, a distinction that itself is tending to dissolve.

What is the result of transforming politics and public affairs into a twenty-four-hour campaign cycle of pseudoevents for citizen consumption? For one thing, the public is regularly presented with a picture of deeper disagreements and a general contentiousness about policy issues than may in fact be true when the cameras and microphones are turned off. Second, immense encouragement is given to the preexisting human tendency to overestimate short-term dramatic risks and underestimate the long-term consequences of chronic problems. Third, public thinking is focused on attention-grabbing renditions of what has gone wrong for which somebody else can be blamed. Thus, any attempt to debate policy continually reinforces a culture of complaint and victimization where seemingly dramatic conflicts never really settle anything or lead anywhere. With artifice everywhere, perhaps one cannot trust anyone. The shrug replaces the vote.

The ultimate result is perhaps most worrisome of all. As Boorstin shrewdly predicted, in the montage of orchestrated happenings,

ordinary people are confused—not so much by the artificial simplifications as by the artificial complication of experience. Political news is news made to happen. Meanings are spun. The performance becomes more significant than what is said. Pseudoevents generate competing pseudoevents. What happens becomes enmeshed in what might have been the motives and whether any statement really means what it says. People who are supposed to be self-governing are taught that nothing is what it is. It is only what it seems, and it is as true to say something seems one thing as another. What is one to say about such a situation? Perhaps only that this way madness lies.

The objection can always be raised by defenders of the status quo that the system—more inclusive, openly accessible, and ear-to-the-ground than ever before—is at least responsive. The concept of responsiveness deserves careful consideration, for it returns us to the central confrontations between governing and campaigning. Clearly, what has been described in this chapter is not the *deliberative responsiveness* of the constitutional tradition. Such responsiveness would reflect a picture of representative government in which institutional structures known to the written Constitution hold expressions of popular opinion at a distant arm's length from government discussions. Deliberative responsiveness would leave us still in the normative mind-set of the Founding Fathers. It is the mind-set that argued that the public voice pronounced by the representatives of the people will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves.<sup>32</sup> In the sense of popular sovereignty, the people and their opinion were to rule, but public opinion was not to govern.

If deliberative responsiveness has not given us direct popular control over policymaking, neither has the permanent campaign done so. Were public opinion such a prime mover of government action—what might be called *mimetic responsiveness*—then we should find policymakers more or less reproducing whatever it is the public wants. Surely, it is difficult to see the political class as pandering automatons in a time when two-thirds or more of the American people consistently claim that elected officials neither pay attention to nor understand what they think and that most govern-

ment decisions are not the choices the majority of Americans would make. If the permanent campaign were a matter of simply echoing the will of the people, we should not have the legitimacy paradox. In the same period when political leaders have become ever more attentive to and sophisticated in gauging public opinion, the public has become ever more distrustful and alienated from a political process perceived as being out of touch with its constituents.

The same paradox excludes an opposite interpretation. That view would understand the permanent campaign as total manipulation of public opinion through the new technologies of mass persuasion. A “captive public” so enthralled by opinion meisters would surely be too deluded to register the high levels of disenchantment with the political process that now prevail.<sup>33</sup>

The term that perhaps best describes what happens in the permanent campaign is *instrumental responsiveness*.<sup>34</sup> It is a hands-on approach to leveraging and massaging opinion to make it serve one’s own purposes. The campaigners do not engage the public to teach people about real-world happenings and thereby disabuse them of false hopes or encourage forbearance against harsh realities. Rather, the permanent campaign engages people to tell them what they want to hear in ways that will promote one’s cause against others. Such instrumental responsiveness appears to be the system’s functional philosophy, even while mimetic responsiveness—doing the people’s will—is its confessional theology.

No one can say how long such instrumental responsiveness may continue to dominate the permanent campaign. Should disasters occur and the people become sufficiently confused and angry, they may stop telling each other to have a nice day. Like a blinded animal, they may turn on their handlers and demand a reign of mimetic responsiveness, no doubt with new demagogues arising to feel their pain and meet their needs. Some hints of such growing public yearning for majoritarianism and democracy by plebiscite already exist.<sup>35</sup>

For the time being, however, all the advantages appear to lie with the immense infrastructure and financial stakes of the permanent campaign. Its momentum takes us into a future of better-orchestrated but shortsighted political warfare. It promises less



deliberation and more selling, more preoccupation with political fund-raising, and more puzzlement that nothing can be taken at face value. The permanent campaign is a school of democracy, and what it teaches is that nothing is what it seems, everything said is a ploy to sucker the listener, and truth is what one can be persuaded to believe. Of course, that is not true for every person on every occasion. It surely is, however, the general bent of instruction.

Why should one care? Because our politics will become more hostile than needed, more foolhardy in disregarding the long-term, and more benighted in mistaking persuasions for realities. The case for resisting further tidal drift into the permanent campaign rests on the idea that a self-governing people should not wish to become more vile, myopic, and stupid. Apart from that, there probably is not much reason to care.

Peace and prosperity can deceive, but wartime pressures distill into their clearest essence the dangers of conflating political campaigning and governing. Government-sponsored propaganda campaigns abound under modern conditions of total war. It is disastrous, however, to confuse the propaganda campaign with the realities of the war-making campaign. Failure to govern on the basis of the truths of the situation, as best they can be known, is a sure route to eventual disaster for the governed and rulers alike. History suggests that one major reason the Western democracies were better governed in World War II than their opponents was that their leaders brought their people into the truth of governing the war effort and did not merely campaign to raise morale. While fascist dictators fell into the trap of believing propaganda campaigns they conducted with their own people, leaders such as Roosevelt and Churchill—even if in very general ways—told citizens about the hard truths of their situation. In his first war report to the nation on December 9, 1941, for example, President Roosevelt not only told the people, “So far, all the news has been bad.” He also told them, “It will not only be a long war, it will be a hard war.” There would be shortages: “We shall have to give up many things entirely.” FDR said that he would not tell the people that there would be sacrifices ahead. He said instead that there would be the “privilege” of suffering.<sup>36</sup>

Fast-forward almost sixty years, and we find America in repose and its national politics having ended the century with a major debate on the budget and Social Security. Throughout 1999, Republicans and Democrats contended over how to use the federal budget surplus responsibly, and each side solemnly promised not to let the other side raid the Social Security trust fund. But the great debate was little more than elaborate and well-crafted posturing grounded in polls and focus-group thinking. On any reasonable projection, the budget surplus in the immediate future is merely the calm before the storm of fiscal problems that will be produced by an aging population sustained by accelerating medical breakthroughs.

Meanwhile, the long-term financial imbalance of the Social Security system is a monumental problem that has gone unaddressed. Certainly, no national program touches so many Americans in so many ways over such a long period. When the favorable state of the economy and the budget made Social Security remedies relatively easy, when the long lead time to the system's insolvency in 2034 made action relatively painless, why in the governing process did politicians bypass such a golden opportunity? The answer lies in the advantages offered by posturing rather than by deliberating, as politicians looked toward the 2000 elections. It was one more illustration that in America's current political situation, "framing the issue," "setting the agenda," "sending messages," and the like can be at least as important as striking a particular deal to achieve a policy settlement. Long-term settlements appropriate to governing may actually be the last thing wanted by those most committed to the permanent campaign.

It is reasonable to conclude that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, American national politics had gone past a mentality of campaigning to govern. It had reached the more truly corrupted condition of governing to campaign. In other words, among political leaders and their tolerant citizen onlookers, it seemed better to have a campaign issue for the 2000 election than to deal with a vital public issue by actually governing. It is no exaggeration to use the imagery of true "corruption" in its classic sense—something much darker than money or sex scandals. We can know quite well

from history when democratic politics is passing from degradation to debauchery. That happens when leaders teach a willing people to love illusions—to like nonsense because it sounds good. That happens when a free people eventually come to believe that whatever pleases them is what is true.

### Notes

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9. Charles O. Jones, "Passages to the Presidency: 2000," speech, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., January 5, 1999.
10. The Platonic dialogue *Gorgias* was studied with special care on this subject.
11. Often in early America this meant literally to stand at the courthouse while the local white male property owners appeared to publicly announce their votes. The account in this section is indebted to Michael Schudson's *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: Free Press, 1998).
12. In 1896 the young Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan shocked respectable opinion by initiating the first traveling speaking campaign for the presidency. It was only in 1932 that Franklin Roosevelt broke with the tradition of staying at home to be notified and appeared personally before the convention to accept his party's presidential nomination.
13. Before that, Congress passed the Sedition Act in 1798. Among other things, the act made it a federal crime (with a fine up to \$2,000 and imprisonment

- for up to two years) to “write, print, utter or publish” anything “false, scandalous, and malicious” against the president or Congress “with intent to defame . . . or to bring them . . . into contempt or disrepute; or to excite against them . . . the hatred of the good people of the United States.” James Morton Smith, *Freedom’s Fetters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).
14. That in itself says nothing about who should govern, only that true forms of government exist for the sake of the governed as a whole. Aristotle, *Politics* 3.6–8.
  15. By 1949 there were 2,423 full-time federal employees engaged in public relations activities, a classification that excluded persons doing publication work required by law. Edward L. Bernays, *Public Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 151 ff.
  16. “And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppression.” John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644).
  17. Raymond K. Price, quoted in Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President, 1968* (New York: Trident Press, 1969), 192–95 (italics in the original).
  18. Quoted in A. V. Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 2d ed. (London: MacMillan, 1914), 2.
  19. John Markoff, *Waves of Democracy* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 1996).
  20. James Sterling Young, “America’s First Hundred Days,” from a forthcoming book on the presidency and nation leading.
  21. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “How Polling Has Trampled the Constitution and Other Mild Observations,” *Civilization*, August/September 1999, 68 ff.
  22. The intellectual history of this typically “modern” problem is discussed in Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). A recent attempt to rebalance historical explanation between the uncompromising absolutists and uncompromising relativists is Thomas Haskell’s *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Exploratory Schemes in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
  23. Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
  24. Stephen A. Salmore and Barbara G. Salmore, “Candidate-Centered Parties: Politics without Intermediaries,” in *Remaking American Politics*, edited by Richard A. Harris and Sidney M. Milkis (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 215–38.
  25. The early forays into political consulting are revealing. In 1919 Lithuanian politicians hired one of the nation’s first PR firms to persuade Americans to support Lithuanian independence. In 1924 the first White House breakfast with stage and screen stars was orchestrated to soften Calvin Coolidge’s public image in the election campaign. Bernays, *Public Relations*, 80–81.

26. Quoted in *ibid.*, 151 (italics in the original).
27. In a 1989 survey, 44 percent of political consultants interviewed reported that their candidate clients were uninvolved in setting the issue priorities in their own campaigns, and 66 percent reported that their candidates were uninvolved in determining the tactics. Marshall Ganz, "Voters in the Crosshairs," *American Prospect*, no. 16 (Winter 1994): 103.
28. *Washington Post*, November 8, 1994.
29. These and subsequent Moynihan quotations are taken from National Goals Research Staff, "Statement of the Counselor to the President," *Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 4, 1970), 5–7.
30. The Kettering Foundation and Harwood Group, *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street America* (Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation, 1991), chap. 5.
31. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).
32. "The republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they intrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse, which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests." *The Federalist Papers* No. 71. See also Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* (New York: Norton, 1972), 596 ff.
33. Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
34. I owe this term to Lawrence Jacobs, who contrasts it with *substantive responsiveness*. For the latter I have preferred the more descriptive title *mimetic responsiveness* and would regard substantive features to be more accurately associated with the deliberative process. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
35. Steven Kull, "Expecting More Say: The American Public on Its Role in Government Decisionmaking," Center on Policy Attitudes, Washington, D.C., May 10, 1999.
36. Harold L. Hitchens, ed., *America Goes to War* (Chicago: Columbia Educational Books, 1941), 51–56.