

Bifurcated Politics: Evolution and Reform in the National Party Convention. Byron E. Shafer. *Harvard University Press*, \$27.50. There are times, all too rare, when a scholarly book is on the cutting edge of the news. Shafer's is one of those books. Just as the networks, the political strategists, the print media, and the political parties themselves are attempting to come to grips with the realization that conventions no longer meet traditional expectations, Shafer has produced an incisive analysis of these gatherings.

He takes as his starting point the obvious: that conventions no longer nominate presidents. Primary and caucus electorates do. Instead, conventions have become launching pads, sometimes providing an exemplary lift-off, sometimes not. Sounds simple, but from these elementary facts Shafer builds an elegant argument, extending beyond conventions to illuminate the interior political dynamics of the new, post-1968 political parties.

For both parties, the last "nominating" conventions were in 1952, 36 years ago, when Adlai Stevenson needed three ballots to beat Estes Kefauver and Dwight Eisenhower had to demonstrate his strength in a series of credentials battles in his contest with Robert Taft. It was not, however, until after 1968 that Democratic-initiated reforms radically altered the delegate selection process for both parties. State legislatures created more primaries and caucuses, shifting power from party officials meeting at the conventions to the voters.

Shafer's data demonstrates that the percentage of Democratic delegates chosen by party structures fell from 57 percent in 1968 to 18 percent in 1972 and to 9 percent in 1976. For the GOP, the process was a little slower, falling from 52 percent party-selected delegates in 1968 to 39 percent in 1972 and to 15 percent in 1976. Reforms have left the leaders with very little power to broker.

Within this political setting, Shafer

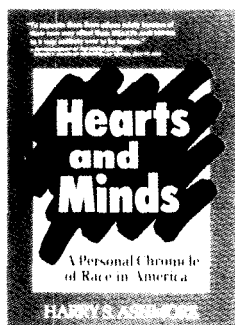
also describes how the domination of convention proceedings by television and the growing power of special interest groups (such as the National Education Association and the Moral Majority) in the selection of delegates have converted conventions into new battlefields.

One struggle takes place between the prospective nominee and the competing collection of special interests—both those supportive of the nominee and those linked to the losers—over the convention agenda. The candidate's goal is to suppress conflict and demonstrate full executive control, while the delegates committed to a special interest try to get their issues fully before the convention and television cameras. Of course these interests can use the *threat* of a prime-time protest to coerce the nominee and the party into recognizing them.

George McGovern is the quintessential example of the candidate who could not maintain control over the constituencies he had mobilized to win the nomination. For instance, his vice-presidential choice of Sen. Thomas Eagleton was challenged on the floor by feminists, many of whom backed McGovern but insisted on running Frances Parnithol of Texas against Eagleton. "Not only did this full range of conflicts deny the nominee much chance to orchestrate his own convention..." Shafer writes, "his acceptance speech... could not be delivered until 3 a.m. eastern time, when an estimated 80 percent of the earlier viewing audience had already gone to bed."

By contrast, in 1984 Ronald Reagan ran as an unchallenged incumbent who was able to fully orchestrate his convention, suppressing all conflicts between moderates and the new right, the country club traditionalists, and the Christian fundamentalists. Shafer points out that the party holding a convention with lower levels of conflict has, at least for the elections from 1964 through 1984, been the winner in November.

The convention is also a struggle between the strategists for prospective presidential nominees and the networks themselves. Ironically, this contest becomes most intense in relatively conflict-free conventions. The



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networks feel they have become appendages of the political campaigns. This was epitomized by the dispute over coverage of the video used to introduce President Reagan in 1984, coverage that only ABC agreed to supply.

The battle between the networks and the winning campaigns has become all the more important as the networks have cut back coverage. Cut-backs mean that convention managers can no longer be confident that the events they have scheduled will be covered; within smaller time periods the networks can, at any time, cut away to their own commentary, to separate discussions of issues, or to their own prepared stories. This was the case with ABC in Atlanta in July when the network broke from Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton's nominating speech to present a Jeff Greenfield story on Dukakis's early political career. (In that case, ABC may have done Dukakis a favor, as Clinton's speech was one of the less gripping events of the 1988 Democratic convention.)

It now appears that insights such as Shafer's are beginning to be reflected in the thinking of both political strategists and media officials. There is a growing consensus that the parties should reduce the number of days for the convention from four to three, a reflection both of the lack of genuine nomination drama and of declining television coverage.

In the long run, however, the developments cited by Shafer point toward growing pressures within each party to suppress conflict—lest disputes hurt the nominee's chances in November. This development is already evident in the calculated blandness of the Dukakis and Bush campaigns, as each has assiduously sought to paper over the substantial intra-party conflicts facing both Democrats and Republicans.

This need for consensus bodes well for the GOP. Despite the infusion of Christian fundamentalists, the GOP remains far more homogeneous than the Democratic Party, whose racial diversity alone may, for the moment, help foster a public image of internal conflict. The pressure for low-conflict conventions could push the parties in

a number of different directions. On the one hand, such pressure could turn pluralism, once a strength in American party politics, into a weakness. Conversely, television might also force each of the parties to begin in the presidential primaries and caucuses to productively address the internal conflicts that could become debilitating if left unaddressed by convention time—conflicts for example, between blacks and blue-collar whites, between supply-siders and traditionalists concerned with deficits, between unionists and suburban reformers, between moralists and libertarians. What's certain is that both parties have adapted remarkably to a political environment changing at an increasingly rapid pace.

—Thomas Byrne Edsall

Leadership in the Modern Presidency. Fred I. Greenstein ed., *Harvard University Press*, \$29.95. Greenstein, one of the most industrious and insightful political scientists, recruited essay writers to

portray presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan. He thinks the presidency "has become firmly institutionalized and is undergoing its own evolution." By institutionalized, he means that the office is more likely to determine a president's performance than is the occupant's personality.

Greenstein sees the modern presidency as triggered by FDR in 1933. Since then, four major changes have evolved: "increased unilateral policy-making capacity" (presidents give orders), "centrality in national agenda setting" (pushing, not reacting), "far greater visibility" (via media), and "acquisition of a presidential bureaucracy" (a big corporation, not a shoe shop).

That the presidency has got itself institutionalized—fixed beyond the person in the Oval Office—is questionable. Sure enough, the above four factors are standing at attention as each new president takes office. But some grab them and go, while others slack back. And even if a president can command those instituted factors,

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