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**FATAL DETRACTIONS: THE
ROLE OF GAFFES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

By

Dana Elizabeth DiBiaggio

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

FATAL DETRACTIONS: THE ROLE OF GAFFES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

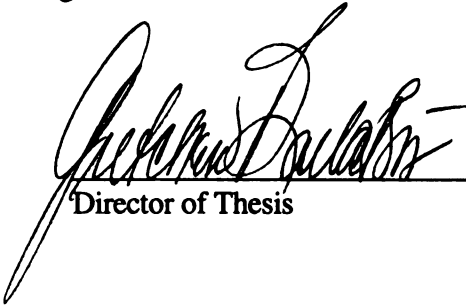
By

Dana Elizabeth DiBiaggio

Considerable academic study and attention has been devoted to the evaluation of presidential candidates on the basis of partisan affiliation, issues and most recently personal attributes. Little academic study and research, however, has been devoted to the evaluation of candidates on the incidents and handling of their negative behaviors (gaffes, blunders, loss of control, character flaws). Due to the lack of recognition of this method of evaluation, the primary objective of this study was to determine whether political practitioners acknowledge the concept of gaffes and believe the resulting degradation or initiation process is a primary purpose of modern presidential campaigns.

Both the literature and the program provide considerable support for the idea that gaffes (blunders, slips, flaws, mistakes, loss of control, political problems) are a political reality to be acknowledged and a force to be contended with during presidential campaigns. The program interviewees were in remarkable agreement as to when these incidents are legitimate campaign issues and with respect to the meaningful information that the handling of them generates. The program findings, however, also suggest that many believe that gaffes are often a trivial preoccupation of the media.

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Telecommunication of
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Director of Thesis

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INTRODUCTION—IMPORTANCE OF ISSUE

The voting public is expressing considerable concern and disillusionment with the presidential selection process. This may be attributed, in part, to confusion about its purpose and a lack of understanding as to what criteria are being used to evaluate candidates.

Disillusionment and confusion became increasingly clear during the 1988 election year, and the importance of that issue was reflected in the numerous articles and commentaries about the purpose and nature of election campaigns. The unprecedented attention and press given to the candidates' personal attributes or character during the 1988 campaign probably contributed to much of the public discourse about and newly found interest in the purpose of presidential elections.

The critical issue that the political analysts and the popular media failed to address during that campaign as well as others, is why the voting public as well as the media have become increasingly focused on candidates' negative behaviors or gaffes and what purpose this focus serves. The same case can be made for most of the academic literature to date, which has devoted much study and discourse to the increasing focus on candidates' personal attributes and character and neglected to address why we are placing increasing importance on the incidence and handling of their gaffes.

A need exists, therefore, to examine the role of gaffes (mistakes, blunders, slip ups, loss of control) in the presidential selection process. In examining the role of gaffes in election campaigns, some critical issues which need to be explored include:

- ☐ Due to the fact that issues today are so numerous, complex and ever-changing, does the voting public assess the capabilities of candidates primarily in terms of character, leadership, judgment, and accountability?
- ☐ With the remarkable degree of freedom candidates have been given to define and project an image, is a very important and often unrecognized purpose of election campaigns to test the validity of a candidate's projected public image through an assessment of the incidence and handling of gaffes? (Implicit in this premise is the assumption that the purpose of election campaigns is not just to serve as a serious policy-making forum.)
- ☐ Have the electronic media, particularly television with its entertainment nature and focus on image, facilitated and encouraged the persona/image testing aspect of campaigns and thereby increased the focus on gaffes? By focusing on storytelling and characters, has television shifted the primary focus of campaigns from issues to individuals, and more specifically to their negative behaviors or actions?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The 1988 Presidential election will most likely be remembered as the character campaign. The character issue dominated the headlines and nightly news; new phrases such as character cops, character test, and character assassination were coined almost on an hourly basis. At the time, many were arguing that the disclosure of Democratic contender Gary Hart's extramarital affair was what triggered our culture's obsession with candidates' personal attributes and character. History and scholarly studies and research, however, prove that proposition to be much too simplistic.

Taking it Personally

Much of the recent academic research on the evaluation of presidential candidates has focused on the increasing importance or weight given to candidate's personal attributes—especially since the emergence of television as the medium of politics.

As early as 1966, Stoke's (1966) analysis revealed that the physical attractiveness of candidates could either cause voters to maintain or change their current partisan affiliation, and thereby provided evidence that the personal attributes of candidates play a critical role in the evaluation of candidates.

It was not until the late 70s or early 80s, however, that a larger body of research emerged regarding the increasing focus on candidates and their personal attributes and character. Markus and Converse (1979) suggested that voter's evaluations of the candidates' personal attributes significantly influence how they vote. Numerous other studies suggested that the

consideration of the personal attributes plays a central role in candidate perception and voter behavior (e.g. Kinder et al, 1980; Conover, 1981; Kinder and Abelson, 1981; Miller et al, 1982).

A 1980 study concluded that in every election since 1952, candidate and issue attitudes have been much more salient and important in voting choices than party attitudes. Candidate references concerned attitudes about their experience, performance-related traits as well as character-related traits. Using data from SRC/CPS Election Studies (1952-1976), the study found that the salience of candidate attitudes has fluctuated between 34 and 45 percent of the total and the salience of issue attitudes had fluctuated between 43 and 57 percent (Kessel, 1980; pgs. 201-219).

Data from the 1970s also suggest the importance of a candidate's personal qualities. Late in the 1976 primaries, for example, one survey reported that 57 percent of U.S. residents chose their favorite candidate more on the basis of personal qualities than on specific issues positions (Marshall, 1981; pg. 139). According to Marshall, personalities and personal qualities were important in the 1980 race—an election in which Senator Edward Kennedy's personal misfortunes and flaws cost him widespread support that he might otherwise have received (Marshall, 1981; pg. 140).

Prior to the mid 1980s, however, most formal theories assumed that voting choices were made primarily on the basis of party or issues. Sandra Davis (1987) discussed the turning point of formal theories of voting behavior in her review of literature:

“A recent formal theory (Enelow and Hinich, 1982) has incorporated nonissue factors which make it possible for citizens to logically choose the candidate who is farther from their own ideal point if their evaluation of the candidate is sufficiently positive. Enelow and Hinich's inclusion of candidate evaluation makes their model more consistent with American campaigns. Empirical studies indicate that both issues and candidate attributes are an important determinant of the vote (Steeper and

Teeter, 1976; Popkin et al, 1976; Kessel 1980). Criteria such as a candidate's experience, leadership, administrative ability or intelligence are legitimate bases on which to judge a candidate, since they provide some indication of how well the person will perform in office on both campaign issues and problems which were not anticipated before the election."

In Evaluating Presidential Candidates: Who Focuses on their Personal Attributes, Glass (1985) examines the public's perception of presidential candidates' personal attributes and discredits the belief that the better educated are less concerned with the personal attributes of presidential candidates than the less educated. In fact, the study found that highly educated individuals are more concerned with personal attributes than the less educated and that both groups expressed interest in the trivial (a candidate's physical appearance, personality, family background and religion) as well as the more meaningful and substantive aspects (experience, leadership, and performance capabilities) of candidate attributes.

This point is driven home by social researcher Daniel Yankelovich who says there are three facets of American politics—one of which is a "politics of values." George Will elaborates on one of these facets in a newspaper column:

" 'The first is that we have a politics of values, not issues.' He (Yankelovich) means that voters define issues in terms of candidates articulations of fundamental values. Carter perfected it, emphasizing post-Watergate honesty; Reagan continued it, promising post-Carter strength" (Detroit News 2/12/88).

Specific Attributes: *The Importance of Performance and Character-Related Traits*

Glass (1985) also presents evidence that between 1952 and 1984 the American public usually expressed greater interest in the candidates' character and competence than in their personal attraction and this applies to both the less and the more educated voters. Using data from the *National Election Study* gathered between 1952-1984 (University of

Michigan), it was found that 50 percent of all comments on personal attributes concerned character and 33 percent focused on candidates' competence.

Many other studies have attempted to determine the specific attributes which are important in the evaluation of a candidate. These studies and other literature reveal an amazing consensus on the general categories of traits which appear to be of the greatest importance to voters as they evaluate candidates.

Using data from a national study undertaken by the *Center for Political Studies* at the University of Michigan to develop an ideal president prototype, it was found that the most important qualities for a president to possess are competence and trustworthiness (elsewhere referred to as performance and character-related traits). With regard to competence, the results indicated that an ideal candidate is not only technically competent and knowledgeable, but also capable of facing formidable challenges and making difficult decisions. It was also found that an ideal president must be honest and not motivated by political power and that these attributes are desired by individuals with all levels of education (Kinder et al; 1980). What the study failed to provide is evidence that these prototypes provide standards by which real presidential candidates are evaluated.

Presidential scholar James David Barber also contends that a candidate's trustworthiness weighs heavy in voters' evaluations: "The public cannot handle intricate political issues; it can handle relatively clear questions. Is this guy honest? Is this guy moral?" (Time, 5/18/87; pg. 33).

As early as 1976, Nimmo & Savage (1976) found that the particular attributes that are used to judge candidates vary greatly across individuals and elections, although there are some

enduring qualities that are sought in presidential candidates—namely, competency and trust.

In Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections, Benjamin Page notes that electoral choices involve not only what candidates stand for, but also what they are or what they seem to be and that personal traits, including performance-related traits (knowledge, experience, competency and strength) and character-related traits (honesty, dignity and stability, enter into voters' evaluations of presidential candidates (Page, 1978; pgs. 232-277).

Like Page, others find performance and character-related traits to be most important in evaluating candidates. According to Thomas Marshall, traits such as leadership, honesty, morality, and candor are often reported by voters in explaining their vote choice. He also notes that a survey of the 1972 New Hampshire primary found that personal attributes such as honesty (a character-related trait) and leadership capabilities (a performance/competency-related trait) were rated as more important by the voters and proved to be better predictors of vote choice than were issues, and that throughout the 1980 primaries, voters named honesty and integrity (character-related traits) as the most important factors in their choice (Marshall, 1981; pg. 140).

In *The Presidential Campaign*, Stephen Hess summarizes necessary Presidential qualities and also emphasizes performance-related traits (intelligence, knowledge, decisiveness and physical stamina) and character-related traits (honesty, courage and the ability to inspire public trust).

More recently, a 1987 *U.S. News and World Report* study, conducted in conjunction with the Roper organization, found that only 25 percent of those polled believed that a candidate's political party was of crucial importance. In sharp contrast, 74 percent

identified compassion and 62 percent of those polled identified personal morality as attributes of critical importance (U.S. News and World, 12/28/87: pg. 29).

And finally, in his concluding remarks, (of his analysis of the 1984 NES Survey), Markus (1988) writes: “The consistent finding that positive emotional response to the candidates is more influential than negative emotional response suggests that elections turn more on moral leadership and leadership competence and less on issues. Issue appraisals do not seem to have much, if any, influence on the emotional enthusiasm created by candidates” (Markus, 1988, pg. 755).

The Personal is Meaningful

In reviewing this literature, the following question needs to be answered: Why are the voting public—the highly educated as well as the less educated—and the media so interested in the personal attributes of candidates?

One explanation that Glass presents is, “ That many of the better educated, recognizing the nature of presidential campaigns, view policy pronouncements with skepticism and accordingly place more weight on the candidate’s personal attributes...because they feel that this is a subject on which they can obtain more accurate and meaningful information about the candidates” (Glass, 1985; pg. 531).

“Even when the focus of a campaign appears to switch from personalities to issues, it is often what the issue reveals about “the man” rather than the issue itself which is in the spotlight. Thus in 1976 when Gerald Ford blundered by saying that Poland was free of Soviet domination, interest was aroused less because Ford’s statement implied a new

reality or shift in policy than for what the statement was thought to imply about Ford's intelligence" (Glass, 1985; pg. 517).

Benjamin Page (1978), like Glass, holds there is a reason and a rational explanation for why we are focusing on these personal attributes:

"As we have suggested, voters who pay attention to the personal characteristics of candidates should not be dismissed as irrational. While the ambiguity of candidates makes it costly to find out in any detail exactly what policies they stand for, information about their personal characteristics is relatively cheap and abundant. Moreover, the information is relevant. A flaw like rigidity or impulsiveness in presidential character may affect behavior in foreign policy crisis and could conceivably lead to nuclear catastrophe" (Page, pg. 262).

Stephen Hess, a senior fellow in governmental studies at The Brookings Institution, presents a similar argument in *The Presidential Campaign*:

"What you need in office is a man who can cope with situations as they arise, situations that no one even thought of. Since circumstances change, crisis arise, our dilemma becomes how to judge without certified knowledge...So in place of a checklist we insist that our potential president run an obstacle course. A candidate in 1972 suddenly discovers that his running mate has a record of serious mental illness; a candidate in 1952 suddenly discovers that his running mate has a secret fund of \$18,000 contributed by wealthy supporter. The candidates must make a decision, quickly, in full public view. And in watching the candidates in the act of making decisions we are given the opportunity to learn something about them, something that is useful in trying to assess how they might respond to sudden crisis if they were in the White House" (Hess, 1978; pgs. 44-45).

This explanation reflects a trend that emerged in the mid '80's in academic and popular literature which contends that the evaluation of candidates on the basis of their personal attributes is not necessarily trivial, irrational or without meaning. The literature argues that voters may focus on the personal attributes of a candidate to gain meaningful information to help them assess how that person will perform in office.

Presidential scholar James David Barber dedicated much of his energy in the '80s to the study of character and provides significant insight into why candidates' personal attributes play such a critical role in voters' evaluations. In *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, Barber writes:

“To understand what actual presidents do and what potential Presidents might do, the first need is to see the man whole—not as an abstract embodiment of civic virtue, some scorecard of issue stands, or some reflection of a faction—but as a human being like the rest of us, a person trying to cope with a difficult environment. To that task he brings his own character, his own view of the real world, his own political style. If we can see the pattern he has set for his political life we can, I contend, estimate much better his pattern as he confronts the stresses and chances of the Presidency...The President is not some shapeless organism in a flood of novelties, but a man with a memory in a system with history. Like all of us, he draws on his past to shape his future” (Barber, 1985; pgs. 3, 4, & 14).

The media have also recently acknowledged that the focus on personal attributes is a meaningful rather than a trivial exercise in our assessment and evaluation of presidential candidates. Jonathan Alter, a senior writer with *Newsweek*, offers a similar explanation for this focus on candidates' personal attributes and character: “While it is true that this year's emphasis on character has been frivolous and excessive at times, at least, it is an attempt to address the question of what a candidate would be like in office” (Alter, 2/1/88; pg. 25).

Some members of the media even go so far as to hold that not only does the evaluation of candidates' personal attributes provide meaningful information—such an evaluation provides more meaningful information than an evaluation of candidates' issue or policy positions. In a column titled “Issues are Secondary to Candidate's Honesty”, Andy Rooney argues, “The basic integrity of a public official is more important than what he thinks about the mining of the Persian Gulf, taxes or the national debt” (Detroit News, 9/30/87). And while William Schneider does not say this outright, he certainly implies it in one of his syndicated columns:

“During 1987, a certain correlation became noticeable in both political parties. The candidates who gained the most—Bush, Dole and Dukakis—were selling competence and professionalism. The candidates selling ideas—Kemp, Babbitt and DuPont—stayed at the back of the pack...Two Democrats who started experimenting with big ideas—Gephardt and Simon, ended up getting burned” (Detroit News 1/15/88).

The Need to Test What is Wrong with the Picture

“No wonder Campaign ‘88 has acquired a cheap, hollow feeling. Even when candidates manage to craft a clear message, their pitch seems to have trouble passing a reality test”

(Kaus & Fineman 2/15/88; pg. 25)

In addition to suggesting that meaningful information—relevant to assessing how a person will perform in office—can be obtained by focusing on candidates’ personal attributes, this literature also suggests (although more indirectly) that presidential elections have a dual purpose. The purpose of elections, therefore, is not just to test candidates’ issue positions and policy pronouncements but to also test their person—which in politics happens to be more often a candidate’s publicly-projected image or persona.

The political reality of a candidate’s personal qualities is a matter of the image that candidate projects (Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987). According to Nimmo, “To most people the very word image suggests political leaders, because journalists regularly publicize such notions as image merchants, candidates, and projection” (Nimmo, 1974, pg. 97). Through the use of symbols leaders persuade people to follow them by identifying with the images their potential followers have of themselves or with the images those same people have of an ideal president or other public official (Nimmo, 1974). While politicians have long recognized this and used imagery and images throughout time to win public approval, with the professionalization of politics (pollsters and political consultants) and the emergence of television, the voting public has become increasingly concerned with image making and manipulation by presidential candidates.

This has proven to be a valid concern. A 1987 study found that a candidate's image can be shaped to manipulate voters' preferences. The study demonstrated that by using different presentations (photographs) of the same person, one could produce quite different images of that person's likableness, integrity, competence, and general fitness for public office. "This suggests that, with appropriate pretesting and adequate control over a candidate's public appearance, a campaign consultant should be able to significantly manipulate the image projected to the voting public" (Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987; pg. 44).

Much of this recent literature also suggests that voters address this concern by focusing on the personal attributes of candidates in an attempt to determine the validity of their publicly-projected image. In *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections*, Benjamin Page alludes to this method of candidate evaluation:

"The first is the problem of image making and manipulation. What if the man who is elected is not what he seems? What presidential candidates are, what images they try to project, and what the voters actually perceive are not necessarily identical. At the same time, however, we would argue that there are limits to manipulation and confusion and that voters can judge candidates' personalities, just as they judge the government's past performance, with reasonable accuracy" (Page, 1978; pg. 263).

In *Politics By Humans*, James David Barber suggests the need for such a test or method of evaluation and presents the following case: Nixon and LBJ stories made it clearer than ever before that candidates and the president could fool the people, and that we had better be careful whom we crowned as the most powerful person in the world. He elaborates with an analysis of Carter the campaigner and Carter the President:

"However one rates recent Presidents, there is no denying this fact: President after President has been picked for virtues he turned out not to have. In 1976, an important dimension of Jimmy Carter's image, in addition to his morality, was his competence; he seemed a political engineer, a systematic operator. From the start,

the Carter White House was a font of fumbling, especially with Congress, paving the way for the Reagan replacement” (Barber, 1988; pg. 443).

And, others have addressed the need:

“The original idea behind character reporting is perfectly legitimate. Why find out about a person’s flaws after he has reached the White House? Even if minor in itself, does an incident fit into a familiar pattern that illuminates more serious shortcomings? If a candidate does something out of keeping with his public image, is it a small miscue or a sign of hypocrisy? (Alter, 10/19/87; pg. 79).”

“Though the American electoral method falls short of perfection, alternative systems would be equally flawed. If the system cannot equally test the personal, political, and executive talents that are necessary in the White House, the process should give priority to testing the personal. For they are the most immutable, the least likely to be changed by experience in office. Presidents can become politicians and executives; they are not likely to become better persons” (Hess, 1978; pg. 52).

The importance of this method of candidate evaluation has also been acknowledged by members of the media, most notably by Daniel Schorr:

“At a time when public figures appear to be inventing themselves for television, there is an iron law that you must live by the image you create for yourself. Americans have come a long way in tolerance for departures from traditional norms; just two decades ago, divorce could be a barrier to election. But there is less tolerance for departure from your own portrait of yourself. Gary Hart’s trouble was not so much his extramarital affairs as that they violated his depiction of himself as a good family man. Senator Joseph Biden’s problem was not so much his borrowing of speech lines and his enhancement of his resume as that these things contradicted the image of candor and breezy spontaneity he had fashioned for himself” (Schorr, 1987).

The following quotes from various sources provide further evidence of the pervasiveness of this method (image testing) of candidate evaluation and the seemingly universal acceptance and acknowledgment of it:

“As candidates depend increasingly on slick media advisors and image campaigns, the press takes a greater role in trying to illuminate the person behind the facade” (Zoglin, 5/18/87; pg. 28).

“Neil Postman who wrote *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, a highly critical look at the television culture, thinks television has changed modern perceptions in the most basic way and offers Ronald Reagan as a prime example: ‘ When he took over, reporters checked his statements and found them wanting. After a while they gave up because they felt it was irrelevant. People were judging him by another standard—by the credibility of the image they saw’ “ (McLoughlin et al, 7/27/87; pg. 18).

“But there was more than the rosy-glow syndrome to explain why people originally saw a Dukakis who seemed different from the one they are seeing now. The sheer magnitude of the artifice involved in campaign presentation produces a prettified picture. However, you can prettify some of the picture all of the time, and all of the picture some of the time, etc. With constant, prolonged appearances, the authentic nature of the candidate begins to peek through...Usually (though not always) a candidate can’t make it by faking. Americans have pretty good scenting capacities and instincts” (Newsweek, 9/19/88; pg. 90).

Blaming it on the Tube

“The age of television campaigns began with the presidential election of 1952 and by 1968 American presidential elections had become a spectator sport. The players in the game were the candidates, with their teams of pollsters and media consultants, and a press corps which not only described but explained and judged what the candidates were doing. By the last third of the century, American presidential elections had become almost entirely candidate and media-centered events” (Salmore and Salmore, 1985; pgs. 41-45).

Concurrently, with the heightened interest in and the increasing weight being given to candidates’ personal attributes in the presidential selection process, a body of literature emerged regarding the role of the medium of television in influencing candidate image and subsequently voting behavior.

“As early as 1958 critics began voicing concern over the shift in emphasis from issues to images in political campaigns because of television, arguing that the preoccupation with both physical appearance and personality traits had usurped the once important place of expressed issue stances by candidates running for political office,” (Shyles ,1984; pg. 406).

Since its emergence, television's image-making power is thought to have been influential in most elections, particularly in the Nixon-Kennedy debates and in Carter's campaign of trust and honesty (Barber, 1987; White, 1987; Marshall, 1981). In fact, many claim the outcome of the Presidential election of 1960 was dramatically influenced, if not determined, by the televised debates between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy (Rubin, 1967; pg. 19).

In *Mass Media and Elections*, Richard Joslyn writes:

"In fact, much of the concern about modern campaign practices has revolved around the so-called image-making practices of candidates and the effect television news has on the public's perceptions of candidates. Because of the visual component of television news, the fact that film shots of campaigning candidates are a prevalent part of television news, the use of dramatic and thematic elements in television news stories, and the presumed ability of the television audience to use such fare to form judgments about the personal traits of candidates, television's image making capability is often thought to be greater than the print media" (Joslyn; 1984; pg. 183).

The impact of television on our political process is well-documented by historians and others. In *America In Search of Itself*, Theodore White comments on its impact:

"American politics and television are now so completely locked together that it is impossible to tell the story of the one without the other. All politics have changed to fit this stage. The entourages of presidential candidates have become personal courts where the magicians and wise men are those who know the use and reach of television...Television has made the personality of the candidate central; his quirks, hair, style, skin color, voice tone and apparent sincerity are as important as his themes and programs. It was on television that Ronald Reagan was to be displayed in 1980 as a master of the new stage"(White, 1982; pgs. 164-167).

In *The Election of 1984: Reports and Interpretations*, Gerald Pomper describes television's image-making power and its resulting impact on the outcome of the 1984 campaign:

"The most common explanation of Reagan's victory is Reagan himself. The President's success is not due to his record or his philosophy, but to his image. In this interpretation, tens of millions of Americans voted for a likable individual, who successfully combined stirring if vague rhetoric, a confident personality, an actor's

communication skills, and a verbal commitment to religion and family...In an extension of this emphasis on personality, Mondale gets the personal blame for the Democrats defeat. The former Vice-President was seen as dull 'Norwegian Wood,' a poor performer on television. The problem for the Democrats was not the message, but the messenger" (1985; pg. 79).

Many others have noted that the very nature (entertainment/story-telling/visual) of the medium of television has facilitated and encouraged vote choices based on the personal qualities of candidates. *In Nominating A President: The Process and the Press* (a series of roundtables held February 1-3, 1988), Christopher Lydon, a news anchorman and one of the participants, describes politics as entertainment:

"But television is now the medium of politics as entertainment series. You introduce a character. You hope to have your man in that spot in this conflict series, in which the public and the political world will say, hey that's good, strengthen that character, double his part, bring him forward, make him a star" (1980; pg. 60).

And similar words come from another member of the media in an article titled "*But will he, she, or it Play in Peoria?*":

"The ascension of Oliver North to instant stardom dramatizes if nothing else how profoundly television has transformed our politics and our public morality. The theatricalization of our political life is inevitable. We go to the same source for news and entertainment" (Zimmerman, 7/27/87; pg. 22).

Several academic studies also have revealed television's proclivity to center on the personal attributes of candidates and image.

In examining the role of television on changing voting behavior (namely, the increased candidate-orientedness of the public), Keeter (1987) provided empirical evidence for the proposition that television has facilitated and encouraged vote choices based upon the personal qualities of candidates. Using data from eight presidential election studies conducted by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan, Keeter found

that a candidate's personal qualities and traits have been more important for the television group than for the newspaper group in every election since 1964. Conversely, the weights for personal qualities for the newspaper group since 1960—with the exception of 1972—have remained at a relatively low level, smaller than those reported for the television group. (Voters' chief source of information was determined by asking respondents to identify the medium they "got the most (campaign) information from" (1956-1968) or "rely on most for news about political events" (1976 and 1980).

With respect to the interpretation and meaning of these findings, however, Keeter cautions: "No simple argument is advanced here that television has caused a politics of personality. Without comparable measures of voting criteria prior to 1952, we cannot know if candidate-orientedness was higher or lower in elections before television."

An earlier study by Hofstetter and Strand (1983) produced similar but slightly more detailed findings. They found that media exposure is associated with a tendency to perceive each of the major candidates as holding specific positions on issues. Associations are strongest for exposure to newspaper stories, television specials, and personal discussions. Associations are relatively weak between exposure to television news programming and advertisements and perception of candidates' positions on multiple issues.

Another study compared the coverage by wire services with the coverage by network news during the 1972 presidential campaign; results suggested that the structural differences between the media may be associated with the kind of coverage each typically provided during presidential campaigns. The study found that AP wires focused more on issues than did CBS television and AP wires included comprehensive issue coverage. Malaney and Buss (1979) suggested that this might be the case because the newspapers subscribing to

the wires deal more heavily with issues. CBS news, by contrast, focused more on the campaign itself and on candidate image than did AP wires.

It has also been suggested by some that the new technologies in television have helped to augment this focus on personal characteristics. Political television is now cheaper, more plentiful and much more immediate than ever before: This is a direct result of new video production technologies, new distribution technologies, and new technologies in polling—all of which have made television more reactive especially on a personal level. According to Richard Armstrong (1988), “When candidate A makes a gaffe by saying, for example, he doesn’t think Poland is under Soviet domination, Candidate B can record an indignant rebuttal to that point of view, complete with many pious references to the brave Polish people” (Armstrong, 1988; pg. 21).

Some other significant events which coincided with the emergence and domination of television also influenced the medium’s coverage of political campaigns: Richard Joslyn summarizes these events:

“Campaign coverage was altered after 1960 as a result of the first of Theodore White’s *Making of the President* books. White wrote about the campaign as a novelist would, complete with good guys and bad guys, conflict and suspense, and rich in detail concerning the political decisions and personalities of the candidates. The media’s response to White’s series of books was chagrin at having been scooped and a commitment to prevent it from happening again...Journalists have also become more attentive to the campaign strategies and communication techniques of candidates, and have begun depicting and analyzing them in their news stories. Joe McGinniss’s *Selling of the President, 1968* demonstrated to the media that they ought to pay more attention to the media strategies of the candidates. And the Watergate episode in 1972-73 contributed to a general movement to adversarial or investigative reporting” (Joslyn, 1984; pg. 112).

Television Can Also Bring Life and Meaning to Political Candidates

Studies immediately following the 1988 campaign, found that media, including television, were not just focusing on the trivial or more superficial traits such as physical appearance and personality. When analyzing more than 1500 news stories from the 1988 campaign, Buchanan (1991) concluded that while candidate-qualification stories constituted the third largest category—with nearly 20 percent of the story allocations—these stories represented sound journalistic efforts to explain the qualifications of the candidates. According to Buchanan, an ideal often expressed in assessments of media campaign coverage is that it ought to convey information about presidency-relevant qualifications (e.g. character, competence, and issue information); the coding system measured the extent to which the 1988 coverage implemented that ideal. By character Buchanan means “the kind of person the candidate is, particularly in moral and temperamental terms;” and by competence he means, “the skills, abilities or capacities that television or news stories mention as relevant to the candidate’s ability to lead, work with Congress, devise foreign policy, etc.” With respect to the distribution of stories across qualification categories, it was found that candidates’ issue positions received the most (51 percent) and that the remaining 49 percent were divided almost evenly between character (24 percent) and competence (25 percent) (Buchanan; 1991; pgs. 49-50).

In a similar vein, in discussing various perspectives on the purpose and function of campaigns, Richard Joslyn points out that there is considerable evidence in support of one of these approaches—the “selection-of-a-benevolent leader approach”—and that current campaign communication is more consistent with this approach than others. By introducing and describing this approach, Joslyn lends some additional credibility to the manner in which the media, and particularly television, cover campaigns:

“When elections are seen as a exercise in leadership rather than policy selection, our attention is directed toward the nonpolicy aspects of electoral communication, and behavior. This perspective requires us to consider instead the desirable leadership attributes in cultures like our own. The benevolent leader approach, first, asserts that a fair amount of the campaign communication of both candidates and journalists focuses on the non programmatic personal characteristics of candidates for public office. This recognizes that a candidate represents not only past and future policy decisions, but also a personality and character to which other people respond. Second, the approach assumes that citizens are willing and able to form perceptions concerning the nonprogrammatic attributes and character traits of candidates. Third, this approach argues that the evaluation of the character traits or personalities of candidates is an important determinant of the citizen’s candidate choice and vote” (Joslyn, 1984; pgs. 285-86).

Joslyn adds:

“Despite the uncertainty regarding the nature of candidate coverage provided by campaign news coverage, there is considerable evidence that voters do evaluate candidates as people rather than bundles of issues. In general, people tend to form personal impressions of candidates in a way similar to how they respond to any human being who attempts to persuade them to do something” (Joslyn, 1984; pg. 288).

Moreover, some believe that the all-encompassing power of television is an all-encompassing myth. In *The Real Campaign*, Jeff Greenfield sets out to prove that television and the media made almost no difference in the outcome of the 1980 Presidential campaign. He contends that the victory of Ronald Reagan was a political victory; a victory of more coherent—not necessarily correct—ideas, better expressed, more connected with the reality of their lives, as Americans saw it; a victory vastly aided by a better-funded, better-organized, more confident and united party. He argues his case:

“From the primary season through the general election, the political events of 1980 were powered by factors far more fundamental and far more consequential than the images and the daily data of television and the political press...Up and down the list of basic rules of political media coverage, myth after myth was shattered by what happened in 1980: The early triumphs of a candidate are supposed to create irresistible momentum; but 1980 demonstrated that momentum means nothing if an opponent has a long standing political base. Charisma is the key ingredient of the age of television; but 1980 demonstrated that a charismatic candidate who cannot

explain what he means to do with the power of the Presidency faces an enormous obstacle. The dark skills of media manipulators are supposed to be able to bend the passive viewers' sense of reality; but 1980 demonstrated that some fundamental issues cannot be appreciably moved by image making and that image makers themselves risk great damage in attempting to move beyond what the voters believe deeply to be real" (Greenfield, 1982; pg. 14).

While the strength of Greenfield's argument could be disputed, his premise should, if nothing else, convince his readers that the process of evaluating and selecting presidential candidates is very dynamic, complex and multidimensional. And while the impact of television on this process has been significant, it should not be overstated.

The Role of Candidate's Flaws or Negative Behaviors: *Does Something Positive Result From a Focus on the Negative?*

As demonstrated in the literature review, while considerable attention and study have been given to the increasing weight and importance of personal attributes in voters' evaluations of candidates, little has been devoted to the media and the voting public's increasing emphasis on candidates' gaffes.

A powerful argument is made for "taking gaffes seriously as central objects of electoral discourse," by Lance Bennett (1981) in an academic article titled *Assessing Presidential Character: Degradation Rituals in Political Campaigns*. Bennett contends that when gaffes are viewed this way and taken seriously, they can "be shown to be the basis of clearly identifiable 'degradation rituals' in campaigns." He takes his argument a step further by stating that, "Gaffes and the degradation sequences they can initiate may well constitute the last predictable form of democratic accountability in our electoral process" (1981; pg. 310).

According to Bennett, degradation rituals literally certify that an individual's public persona meets the standards of the group or institution. "This certification is granted when

individuals are alerted to any features of their behavior that violate standards for their roles, and when the offending member is able to repair the breach in ways that indicate mastery of the role” (Bennett, 1981; pg. 313).

The degrading nature (image or character test) of campaigns has been noted by others, many of which were cited in the literature review of this paper. This method of evaluation also was frequently cited throughout the 1988 campaign. In a U.S. News & World Report article, it is noted that “running for president is in every sense a test of stamina, poise and character; and that it is the outcome of the test—more than controversy over issues—that determines who will win the nominations and beyond that the presidency” (U.S. News & World Report, 2/29/87; pg. 20).

Moreover, according to Bennett, the popular histories of campaigns are often written around gaffes and their consequences. And while he mentions a few such incidents, numerous others have been documented throughout history and as far back as 1884. In that year, for instance, when James G. Blaine won the Republican nomination and the Republicans discovered that Grover Cleveland—the reform-minded Democrat—was the likely father of an illegitimate child, a Republican victory seemed inevitable. But Cleveland won the voters’ respect by candidly admitting that the child might be his. He went on to win that election.

Bennett also contends that the handling of such actions or incidents is also critical in our evaluation of candidates and he factors this into his perspective and description of degradation sequences. This sequence and the communication process through which gaffes are defined and addressed is as follows:

- ❑ Gaffes are identified and either formulated into complaints or dismissed as trivial incidents. Gaffes become legitimate campaign issues when they can be defined in terms of general norms about leadership and democratic accountability. Voters determine the validity of such an action or behavior by examining whether the act is inconsistent with the known norm of the campaign conduct. For example, they attempt to determine if there is a crack or fatal flaw in a candidate's publicly projected image. Not all gaffes are legitimate campaign issues; and it is therefore important to distinguish gaffes that violate important political norms or the publicly-projected image from those that represent minor slips of little or no political importance.

“Carter’s 1976 remarks about the ethnic purity of neighborhoods was formulated as a possible violation of major norms about race relations in America. A president’s failure to adhere to such norms would undermine his credibility as a national leader. As a result of the serious nature of this violation, Carter was forced to engage in an elaborate series of attempts to demonstrate his commitment to social equality and integration” (Bennett, 1981; pg. 315). It also, however, was a test of the validity of his publicly projected image—who he was claiming to be, a compassionate liberal.

- ❑ The handling of gaffes or other such incidents also generates meaningful information which is used to make practical judgments about the candidate. To the extent that candidates can respond to these concerns in ways that minimize the gap between expectation and perception of action, the issue can be resolved with a minimum of damage to the candidate’s image and credibility.

The media apparently are beginning to go through a similar process of ascertaining when a gaffe or flaw is a legitimate campaign issue, lending some credibility to Bennett’s premise.

This process is articulated in a Newsweek article titled, *The Search For Personal Flaws:*

Where to draw the line:

“The original idea behind character reporting is perfectly legitimate. Why find out about a person’s flaws after he has reached the White House? Some journalists, sensitive to the pitfalls in judging character, try out tests for what should be reported. Can current or recent activity be expected to continue in the White House? Even if minor in itself, does an incident fit into a familiar pattern that illuminates more serious shortcomings? If a candidate does something out of keeping with his public image, is it a small miscue or a sign of hypocrisy?” (Newsweek, 10/19/87; pg. 79).

Yet, most of the discussion to date has simply dismissed gaffes as trivial preoccupations of a frustrated press or a bored public.

“The routine campaign coverage does not, however, fulfill the media’s desire for drama and excitement. From time to time reporters enjoy a break in their routine when the candidate makes a gaffe or offers a controversial view, or when a reporter uncovers some newsworthy incident in a candidate’s past. The newspapers and newscasts may be filled with the incident for several days...By focusing on these occasional dramatic incidents, the media adds drama to an otherwise unexciting routine” (Marshall, 1981; pg. 72).

“We understand the problem. News is entertainment—ratings depend on it. Issues are boring, not near the fun of candidate gaffes or campaign dissension” (Kamber, 6/15/87; pg. 8).

“And in 1976, as in 1968 and 1972, another apparent consequence of television’s coverage emerged: the enormous significance of the gaffe, the blunder. Shortly before the opening of the 1968 campaign, Michigan Governor George Romney—considered a major contender for the nomination—observed on a Detroit interview show that he had been “brainwashed” on a trip to Vietnam. The wide dissemination of that quote effectively destroyed Romney’s bid for the Republican nomination . In 1972, Senator Edmund Muskie denounced New Hampshire Union Leader editor William Loeb in front of the newspaper’s offices; news film caught the emotionally affected senator with what appeared to be tears on his cheeks. The incident was widely blamed for Muskie’s disappointing showing in the New Hampshire primary. And in the second 1976 debate, President Ford declared that Poland, among other East European nations, did not consider itself under Soviet domination. The heavy political consequences of what was apparently a slip of the tongue pointed to television’s capacity to turn a single statement into a matter of overwhelming weight” (Greenfield, 1982; pg. 18).

In describing the formulation of the “Ethnic Purity” gaffe into a campaign issue and the handling of the it, Barber writes:

“The substance was not big news. The language was made big news...The reporters smelled blood; the press was picking up on the language—too emotional and controversial...The press, now tuned for verbal nuances, returned to the subject ..Ethnic purity had acquired a life of its own—a symbolic life...The key question became not what Carter had done or would do but who he was...Jody Powell thought the press was more interested in how—whether he could handle the problem than they were in whether he was a racist or not...The staff got busy on the strategy...The press would not let him alone until he took it back...The whole episode represented character exploration at its worst—the psychology of the gaffe—though not for the first or last time.

“But in the age of the long campaign, the dash from primary to primary, and media saturated politics, the odds that an exhausted and loquacious candidate would say something silly had risen radically. So had the odds that the press, bleary-eyed with boredom from listening to the same old speeches, would pick up on the markedly unusual turn of phrase. But the assumption behind gaffe-grabbing was psychologically daring to the point of folly: that a single phrase could represent a personality” (Barber, 1980; pgs. 197-198).

Some, however, have acknowledged the importance and usefulness of gaffes or mistakes in the evaluation of a candidate. In *Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics*, Polsby and Wildavsky argue:

“The campaign is about choosing a president. Since most issues are complex, and most voters aren’t interested, the media seek issues that do double duty, illuminating an area of interest and displaying a candidate’s fitness to govern. Unfortunately a candidate’s mistakes can fall into this category, though what counts as a mistake depends on what doubts about the candidate exist in voters’ minds. President Ford’s advisors told him, based on considerable interviewing that many voters who otherwise liked him thought he was not smart enough or sufficiently competent or commanding. His remark about Poland not being under Soviet domination, which he kept repeating because he did not want to seem to be acquiescing to the fact on behalf of the United States, was a serious mistake and hurt him so much because it hit him where he was vulnerable. His opponent, Jimmy Carter, was vulnerable to charges of being arrogant and devious. This is why the Playboy interview hurt him” (1984; pgs. 174-75).

And while Jeff Greenfield in one breath dismisses gaffes as a hungry media phenomenon, in another breath he provides a powerful argument for why these incidents are important and meaningful:

“Kennedy’s political wounds inflicted by the Chappaquiddick issue were not created by “CBS Reports,” or by the flood of newspaper and broadcast questions about the 1969 accident at the dike bridge. The wounds were a result of the incident itself and the impression given by Ted Kennedy’s conduct, which no amount of media manipulation or political rhetoric could erase. And the inarticulate Ted Kennedy of “CBS Reports,” (1979) unable to talk sensibly or convincingly about Chappaquiddick, was not the creation of Roger Mudd or of the CBS producers and executives. The voters’ doubts about Ted Kennedy’s fitness for presidency did not begin with the Mudd interview or the critical press that followed. The press’ obsession with Kennedy’s gaffes and slips of the tongue was, in a clumsy way, an accurate portrayal of a candidate without a theme” (1982, pg. 55).

In a interview about Reagan’s tussles with truth, James David Barber discusses Reagan’s gaffes. While Barber does not discuss mistakes as they relate to a candidate’s performance and evaluation in a presidential election, he alludes to their importance by suggesting the danger of ignoring them. Barber, like Bennett, also apparently believes gaffes are distinguishable and vary in their degree of severity:

“His gaffes are legendary. Did you know that there is more oil in Alaska than in Saudi Arabia? Or that trees cause dangerous air pollution? Or that missiles launched from submarines are recallable? These are just a few of the claims made by Reagan that are patently false. And these are not just itsy-bitsy slips of the tongue, but rather an indication of Reagan’s indifference to the facts in significant areas of public policy. More insidiously, Reagan repeatedly has announced one policy in public, while pursuing an opposite one in private” (People, 3/9/87; pg. 40).

Problem Statement

In reviewing the literature, it becomes quite clear that some aspects of Bennett's theoretical construct have been discussed at great length, and therefore, their significance has been confirmed. Bennett's contention about the prominence of gaffes and the image test in presidential campaigns, for example, is well documented in the literature. Moreover, like Bennett, many scholars and members of the media argue that a primary purpose of a presidential campaign is to test the validity of a carefully-crafted, publicly projected image. This popular perspective on candidate assessment explains the voters and media's increasing focus on candidates' personal attributes and gaffes.

Yet, even with this increased focus and the significant amount of energy and time candidates spend in efforts to repair their images by explaining their mistakes, few recognize the important role that these degradation sequences play in our evaluation of candidates. Few have analyzed, questioned or studied what these incidents and the handling of them might reveal about candidates and how they will perform in office. Bennett contends that because so much attention is paid to gaffes, they must reveal some meaningful and useful information.

Recognizing the voter's lack of understanding of this degradation process, we set out to determine whether political practitioners (individuals directly or indirectly involved in the process) actually acknowledged the concept of gaffes as a political reality and an evaluative device in presidential campaigns. In addition, we wanted to ascertain whether they differentiated gaffes in terms of their level of severity and whether they were in agreement with the notion that the handling of gaffes also "provides meaningful information on which to base and reformulate assessments of character" (Bennett, 1981; pg. 319).

Our rationale in doing this was the following: By first interviewing people who have experienced or witnessed this degradation process, we would be better able to determine whether this theoretical construct has meaning in the “real world.” If we determined that the premise rang true to these professionals, it would lay the groundwork for further study; perhaps the next step would be to perform a more scientific study of the premise that a very important and often unrecognized purpose of presidential campaigns is to test the validity of a candidate’s projected public image through an assessment of the incidence and handling of gaffes.

The objectives of this research (interviews of practitioners) are as follows:

Cognitive Objectives:

- ☐ To clarify what criteria are being used by the voting public to evaluate candidates, and by doing this, to provide a better understanding of the purpose of presidential election campaigns.
- ☐ To convince the viewer that the focus on candidates’ personal attributes and gaffes reveals meaningful information which helps in assessing how a candidate will perform in office.
- ☐ To demonstrate the media’s role and impact on how we evaluate candidates.

Affective Objectives:

- ☐ To make the public feel more positive about our selection process.
- ☐ To increase the public interest about this as well as other political issues.

Behavioral Objectives:

- ☐ To encourage the intention to discuss political issues.
- ☐ To encourage the public to participate in local and national politics.
- ☐ To encourage the intention to vote.

METHODOLOGY

Identification of Issue of Importance

Identified General Issue of Interest for Initial Study

Issue identified was the role of gaffes in the Presidential selection process. Interest in issue was sparked by the increased focus on candidates' personal attributes and gaffes during the 1988 presidential campaign and the voting public's resulting disillusionment.

This disillusionment with the presidential selection process and the confusion regarding the criteria being used to evaluate candidates became very apparent during the 1988 presidential campaign and was reflected in numerous articles and commentaries by members of the media at that time, including the following: *The Shallow Sounds of Campaign '88* (U.S. News & World Report 1/4/88); *A Growing Sense of Disillusion* (U.S. News, 5/18/87); *A Penny-Ante Game* (Newsweek 2/15/88); *What Makes a Candidate Presidential* (Detroit Free Press, 3/13/88); *The Campaign Trail is Swarming with Locusts* (James Kilpatrick, syndicated columnist, 2/19/88); *Packaged Candidates Headed for Doom* (James Gannon, syndicated columnists, 10/5/87).

Conducted a Review of the Relevant Literature on the Subject Matter

Determined and analyzed what had been discussed, studied and concluded about the subject matter by reviewing the following materials:

- ☐ Academic articles and studies;
- ☐ Historical perspectives and accounts on past presidential campaigns by political historians;
- ☐ Analysis and commentaries by members of the media; and
- ☐ Articles and books by practitioners—people who have been or are actually involved in the process.

Identified Project Framework and Refined Problem Statement

The framework for the production was determined after completing the literature review and identifying a significant issue which had received little attention and warranted additional study. The framework was based on a theory developed by Lance Bennett (1981) in an article titled, “Assessing Presidential Character: Degradation Rituals in Political Campaigns” (see description of his theoretical construct on pages 21-23).

Bennett’s theory was selected as the basis for the project primarily because of its uniqueness and profoundness. Most of the academic literature – at least up until that time (1987) – had addressed the focus on candidates’ personal attributes and character, but neglected to explore why there was an increasing emphasis being placed on candidates’ negative behaviors or gaffes.

Bennett’s theory held some additional intrigue because it was also being alluded to in articles written by members of the media. In an article titled “The Public Image and Public Figures”, Daniel Schorr, a senior news analyst for National Public Radio, presented the following argument: “At a time when public figures appear to be inventing themselves for television, there is an iron law that you must live by the image you create for yourself” (Schorr, 1987).

Outlined Program Objectives and Identified the Appropriate Method of Inquiry

With the issue of significance fairly well-defined, the next step involved identifying the most appropriate and effective method of exploring and testing Bennett’s theory. The conclusion was reached that while his theory sounded rational and appeared to be well-founded, it needed to be tested in the “real world.” In other words, while Bennett had provided us with an interesting theoretical construct, its accuracy and applicability in the actual evaluation of presidential candidates, however, had yet to be determined.

It was decided that the best way to determine the relevancy of this theory would be to interview individuals who were or who had been directly or indirectly involved in the process, but not limited to them. Through these exploratory interviews, an attempt was made to determine whether practitioners acknowledged the concept of gaffes as an evaluative device in presidential campaigns and whether they conceptualized these negative behaviors on a continuum of severity. This in turn would help determine if there was an informed common understanding of the term and, more importantly, if the interviewees believed that gaffes should be “taken seriously as central objects of electoral discourse and not as trivial preoccupations of a frustrated press” (Bennett, 1981; pg. 310).

In addition to these interviews, coverage of these incidents in previous presidential elections would be examined to gain a better understanding of how members of the media handled such incidents.

Selected Research Instrument and Presentation Format

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and with the cognitive, affective and behavioral objectives in mind (see page 28), it was decided that the most effective method of inquiring, documenting and presenting the material would be through the format of a documentary. The complexity and intricacies of subject matter and the theoretical construct also, to a great degree, determined the appropriate research instrument—which in this case was again the documentary.

The following aspects or nature of the documentary outlines in greater detail the reasons why this was selected as the preferred research instrument for this project:

It's Respect for Reality – The very nature of the research—to test a theoretical construct and premise in the real world—demanded a research instrument with the best capacity to accomplish the objective. According to Rabiger, “At its best, the documentary reflects a fascination with, and a profound respect for, actuality” (1992; pg. 5). Wolverton presents similar thoughts and comments, “From the beginning the moving picture camera seemed a natural instrument for mankind to discover itself. It was mobile and could look at reality with unprecedented intimacy” (1983; pg. 2).

But Wolverton cautions, “The documentary does not describe and explain reality; it is part of the interplay of beliefs and perception we call reality. What we observe and put on reels is not reality itself, but reality exposed to our method of questioning... Documentary is a container, it is not a content. The basic ground rules for producing documentaries must revolve around intent and not around content that might be called reality. Reality comes into the picture as a corollary of our intent” (1983; pgs. 25-26). Perhaps Rabiger puts it best when he says, “To me the value of the documentary process is that it affirms the importance of imagination and empathy while simultaneously probing the depths of real life for its meaning” (1992; pg. 11).

It's Exploratory Nature – In contrast to a rigid research instrument, such as a survey with a standard set of unalterable questions, the documentary allows for greater flexibility and observation. It allows for the exploration of a complex subject without forcing yes/no or close-ended responses for the sake of quantifiable results and measurability. While a standard set of questions was developed for the research participants in this project, the interviewing process allowed for great flexibility to tailor the line of questioning to each participant and to probe on unexpected responses and angles. In addition, it was determined that the documentary, would uncover nuances and intricacies of the theoretical construct being tested that might otherwise be overlooked or unrecognized.

Simply put, the documentary allows for an in-depth study or analysis of important issues; it goes beyond simply stating facts and findings and gives a perspective to events. And because the subject matter being addressed was not cut and dry or black and white—the survey instrument, therefore, could not afford to be either.

It's Persuasive Engaging Nature – The desired audience reach (the voting public) and the persuasive, move-to-action program objectives presented a stronger case for the use of documentary as the research instrument. Rabiger distinguishes documentary from literature: “ Because of the way literature is experienced, it is a contemplative medium. Reading is a reflective and intellectual activity in which the reader, at his own pace and alone, shares the mental and emotional processes of either the author or his characters. Film on the other hand, is a dynamic experiencing in which cause and effect are inferred by the spectator while the events are happening. This is not to imply that literature is less powerful, but simply to assert the existential insistency with which the medium grasps the spectator's mind” (1992; pg. 13). In simpler terms he argues, “ Documentaries exist not just to act on us intellectually but also to create a change in the way we *feel* about something” (Rabiger, 1992; pg. 38).

Wolverton echoes the same sentiment, “The power of the visual medium allows for the documentation of emotions as well as intellect. What we produce and then label documentary must have a heart; it must have emotion as well as intellect” (1983; pg. 26). While the issue being explored in this project was not as emotionally charged as, for instance, programs addressing issues such as abortion, rape or AIDS, the intent of the research was to still change the way people feel and think about a political issue—an area people often have strong opinions and feelings about.

It's Visual Nature – The old adage—seeing is believing—provides perhaps the strongest argument for the use of the documentary. Early in the process, it was decided that the visual component of this vehicle/medium would enhance the message and material being presented. Many of the incidents discussed in the literature review and the interviews had been recorded by news organizations or documented for historical purposes and provided concrete evidence of the degradation process in presidential campaigns.

Closing Comments

It is important to note that a decision about the specific documentary approach (narrative vs. cinema) was not made until the editing process began. With respect to the approach, the only decision made at the time was to phrase the questions and videotape the interviews in a manner that would allow flexibility in the final decision.

Pre-Production

Prepared a summary of gaffes that had received considerable attention and media coverage—particularly since the emergence of television as the medium of politics.

The summary included the date and location of the incidents as well as an identification of their severity (e.g. silly mistakes/remarks, legitimate campaign issues, major political problems). The intent of this exercise was to determine if there had been considerable attention paid to gaffes in past campaigns and if there was a correlation between the perceived link of a gaffe to a crack in a candidate's image and its severity and impact on the candidate's campaign effort. Some representative examples from this summary include:

Muskie's Crying Incident (New Hampshire, 1972)

Muskie was reported to have broken into tears during a speech in which he blasted a New Hampshire newspaper editor/publisher for criticizing his wife. According to James David Barber, until this incident, the image Muskie had with the great American public was

“Lincolnesque.” Barber also contends that reporters knew otherwise and many thought he was emotional and had a roaring temper (Barber, 1988; pg. 338).

This gaffe could be categorized as major since it reveals a significant flaw and inconsistency with publicly projected image. The loss of control by Muskie raised questions about whether his tendency toward emotional outburst could potentially endanger the country if he were elected.

Ford's Poland Blunder (1976 – Presidential Debate with Jimmy Carter)

Ford insisted that Poland was not under Soviet domination. Broadcasters and columnists played up the incident and interpreted it as a major blunder.

This was considered a major blunder because it put Ford's intelligence and credibility in further question.

Ford's Numerous Slips of the Tongue and General Clumsiness

Ford's leadership capabilities and competence were constantly questioned because on numerous occasions he had problems articulating and communicating his thoughts. These minor slip ups, along with his general clumsiness, became a major issue because of their frequency and as Bennett notes, “they exceeded what many observers regarded as normal and tolerable levels in a leader.”

Carter's Ethnic Purity Comment (Interview with New York Daily News, April 1976)

In an interview with the *New York Daily News*, Carter said that low-income housing projects ought to go mainly “where the housing is needed most—downtown areas of deteriorating cities. Then in responding to a question regarding whether a black center city could survive surrounded by all-white neighborhoods, Carter said he thought so and said: “Provided you give people the freedom to decide for themselves where to live. But to artificially inject another racial group in a community? I see nothing wrong with ethnic purity” (Barber, 1978; pg. 69).

This was considered to be a major blunder and a legitimate campaign issue because it raised questions about whether his liberal talk was merely covering up his real reactionary nature. It raised doubts about the validity of his publicly projected persona.

Kennedy's Criticism of Shah of Iran (1980)

Kennedy criticized the former Shah of Iran during hostage crisis and spent several days clarifying his comments. This was considered to be a major blunder because it raised questions once again about his judgment.

Geraldine Ferraro's Family's Personal and Financial Affairs (1984)

Geraldine Ferraro's troubles began when it was disclosed that she and her husband, New York real estate entrepreneur John Zaccaro, inadvertently underpaid their joint 1978 income taxes. The disclosures also detailed Zaccaro's participation in a complicated real estate deal that raised new questions about the already controversial financing of Ferraro's first congressional campaign" (Shapiro, 1984; pg. 20). This was to be a major gaffe, or campaign issue because it put her integrity and honesty in question; and perhaps more significantly, it put Mondale's judgment in question.

Moreover the handling of the incident—the reaction to the degradation process—further damaged the Mondale/Ferraro campaign. The following describes the unfortunate chain of events that followed: "Along with the detailed financial disclosure statement mandated by law, Ferraro had promised to provide the family's tax returns. Then, little more than a week ago, Zaccaro reneged on the deal. Ferraro then compounded her problems by using an ethnic stereotype to explain Zaccaro's turn about; 'If you have ever been married to Italian men, you know what it's like' " (Shapiro, 8/27/84; pg. 20).

Biden's Bout with Plagiarism (1987)

Biden's borrowing of words, without crediting sources—Robert Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey and others—was considered to be a major gaffe because it went against the grain of what he was purporting to be. His campaign image was that of an open, candid candidate. And also because it underscored existing concerns about him being more style than substance. Biden's handling of the incident and his public confession did not help to alleviate the problem because he only partially admitted to being in the wrong.

Gary Hart's Extramarital Affair (1987)

This was considered to be a major gaffe or character flaw. The issue was not so much his extramarital affair, as that it revealed a crack or a fatal flaw in his publicly-projected image of a "good family man." Moreover, it confirmed the belief that his womanizing was chronic and that the judgment he displayed was clearly relevant to his potential performance as president.

Drafted a General Television Treatment

The initial treatment was intentionally general to maintain the exploratory nature of the work. It provided enough of a framework, however, to help identify the groups which needed representation to ensure for a balanced, objective program. The four primary groups identified were: current or former presidential candidates; members of the media;

political consultants (campaign strategists/media consultants/pollsters/former press secretaries); and academicians (political scientists & political historians).

Identified Specific Individuals to be Interviewed

To ensure for varying perspectives, an attempt was made to secure interviews with experts from each of the four primary groups identified above. The initial “wish list” of potential interviewees included the individuals in Figure 1. Their titles and affiliations as well as the reason they were selected are also summarized in Figure 1.

Developed Strategy to Secure Interviewees

Before making initial calls to targeted participants to determine their receptivity to being interviewed, a strategy was developed to increase the probability of their involvement. The key elements of this strategy were as follows:

- ☐ Attempted to secure interviews with a couple of prominent individuals. This was a critical aspect of the strategy because securing even one prominent individual would lend instant credibility to the project and help convince targeted interviewees that the documentary was an important issue worthy of their involvement.
- ☐ Contacted and generated interest in the program with a senior level professional with PBS in Detroit who also had good contacts with National PBS. PBS expressed an immediate interest in subject matter because of its relevance and timeliness and asked to be kept informed of the progress of the program. PBS’s interest became part of our sales pitch to the potential participants.
- ☐ Developed a concise, scripted explanation of the proposed program’s key issues and objectives to increase the effectiveness of the pitch. The script included the academic framework for the issue to be studied, but also included ideas and issues being

presented by members of the media. By blending academic theory with a “real world” perspective, the issue would seem sexier and would increase its commercial appeal and, therefore, the potential participants’ interest.

- ☐ Researched each individual’s background and read significant materials they had authored. By doing this, it was easier to communicate to each prospective `participant specifically why they were selected and that significant thought went into their being selected. This required very little effort since most of these individuals were selected because of something significant they said, wrote or did.
- ☐ Made a concerted effort to get a firm commitment and interview date and followed-up with more detailed information about the program’s intent and issues.

FIGURE 1

Individual	Title/Affiliation	Reason(s) Selected
Roger Ailes	Political and Communications Consultant	Seasoned consultant entered the field when selling a candidate was becoming a form of television art. Orchestrated Nixon's '68 TV campaign and Bush's '88 campaign.
Jonathan Alter	Senior Writer Newsweek	Represents the perspective of the media and wrote numerous articles during the '88 campaign on this and related issues
Christopher Arterton	Dean, Graduate School of Political Management	Brings unique perspective as both a traditional academic (formerly with Political Science Department and School of Management at Yale) and a practitioner having served for 8+ years as consultant on polls and as an election analyst to Newsweek.
George Bush	Former Presidential Candidate and President	Direct experience with the degradation process and the focus on personal attributes and character.
Jimmy Carter	Former Presidential Candidate and President	Direct experience with the degradation process and the focus on personal attributes and character.
Geraldine Ferraro	Former Vice-Presidential Candidate and Congresswoman from Queens	Direct experience with the degradation process and the focus on personal attributes and character.
Gerald Ford	Former Presidential Candidate and President	Direct experience with the degradation process and the focus on personal attributes and character.
David Halberstam	Journalist, Author, Political Historian	Represents media and academic perspectives.
Gary Hart	Former Presidential Candidate	Direct experience with degradation process.
Ron Nesson	Former Press Secretary to Gerald Ford and Current V.P. News for West Mutual One Radio Network	Brings unique perspective having represented a presidential candidate in a campaign, served as a press secretary and as a member of the media. Served not only as an executive for a major news organization, but also, has worked as a reporter in radio and as a television correspondent for CBS news.
Jody Powell	Former Press Secretary to Jimmy Carter	Has been on both sides of the fence -- as a reporter and as a campaign strategist and a press secretary. Interesting perspective presented in his book "The Other Side of the Story."
Wendy Sherman	Political Strategist for Democrats. Held numerous staff positions for significant political figures.	Nationally recognized political strategist who worked on Dukakis campaign.
Robert Teeter	Pollster. Member of Bush's Campaign team. Seasoned political professional.	
Judy Woodruff	Senior Correspondent with PBS	Represents the perspective of the broadcast media.

Developed List of Likely Participants

After these initial calls were made, a list of likely participants was prepared and submitted to a committee for review. The individuals on this list can be found in Figure 2. It is important to note that because of the nature and timeliness of the our subject matter as well as the national prominence of many of the targeted interviewees, there were unique challenges that had an impact on the final group of selected participants. These challenges included accessibility issues and time and budgetary constraints.

Confirmed Final List of Participants

Confirmed targeted participants' willingness to participate. The likely list of participants became the final or actual list of program participants. The list included all individuals on Figure 2.

Researched Media Coverage of Gaffes

Once the list of likely participants and the general television treatment had been approved and finalized, the next step was to begin researching past television network coverage of the issue and to contact national archives and networks to secure video footage of the relevant incidents.

Identified and Gathered Other Visual Aids

At this time, the identification and gathering of other visual aids (other relevant video) was necessary. Relevant movies, past magazine covers, general historical video, etc. were identified and the process of obtaining rights to some of these aids was initiated. A more concrete decision regarding the necessary, supporting video footage obviously could not be made until most of the interviews had been completed and a rough draft of the script had been prepared.

FIGURE 2

Individual	Title/Affiliation	Reason(s) Selected
Jonathan Alter	Senior Writer Newsweek	Represents the perspective of the media and wrote numerous articles during the '88 campaign on this and related issues.
Richard Armstrong	Author of <i>The Next Hurrah</i>	Book provides a provocative viewpoint – “that politicians actually are packaged goods, manufactured by the intricate machinery of the new campaign technology.” Inside look at how this technology is used and often abused in American Politics.
Christopher Arterton	Dean, Graduate School of Political Management	Brings unique perspective as both a traditional academic (formerly with Political Science Department and School of Management at Yale) and a practitioner having served for 8+ years as consultant on polls and election analyst to Newsweek.
Rob Engle	Media Consultant and Strategist for Democrats	As with others, represents the perspective of campaign consultants.
Geraldine Ferraro	Former Vice-Presidential Candidate Congresswoman from Queens	Direct experience with the degradation process and the focus on personal attributes of character.
Wilma Goldstein	Political Strategist, Director of American Campaign Academy	Well respected, nationally-recognized political strategist.
Rev. Jesse Jackson	Presidential Candidate	Direct experience with the rigors of being a presidential candidate. Made gaffes and has had to handle them and confront media.
Michael Murphy	Republican Media Consultant with Political Advertising Firm	Involved in image making and dealing with the media and has represented several major candidates including Bob Dole's '88 presidential candidacy. Quoted frequently by popular press during '88 campaign. Background in advertising not just political strategy.
Ron Nesson	Former Press Secretary to Gerald Ford, Current V.P. News for West Mutual One Radio Network	Brings unique perspective having represented a presidential candidate in a campaign and served as a press secretary and as a member of the media. Served not only as an executive for a major news organization, but also, has worked as a reporter in radio and as a television correspondent for CBS news.
Jody Powell	Former Press Secretary to Jimmy Carter	Has been on both sides of the fence – as a reporter and as a campaign strategist and a press secretary. Interesting perspective presented in his book “The Other Side of the Story.”
Kenneth VerBurg and Charles Press	MSU Political Scientists, Co-authors of “American Politicians and Journalists.”	Represents academic perspective. Interest sparked by their book which discusses the mutual dependence of politicians and the journalists who cover them and how they work together in “guarded cooperation” to advance their own careers.

Developed Line of Questioning for Individuals to be Interviewed

This was one of the most critical steps in the process due to the specific, focused nature of the subject matter and the fact that there was only one opportunity to get the necessary information from the interviewees. In preparing the questions, the first conclusion reached was that there would be a general line of questioning used for all the interviews and additional tailored questions for most of the participants. One general line of questioning was prepared on the defining, incidence and handling of gaffes and a second one was prepared on the media's role and impact.

General Line of Questioning (The defining, incidence and handling of gaffes.)

1. How do you define a political gaffe or blunder?
2. When does a gaffe become a legitimate campaign issue?
3. What determines the severity of a gaffe?
4. What is the normal, tolerable level of gaffes, blunders or slip-ups in a presidential campaign?
5. If any, what sort of useful information do gaffes convey or reveal?
6. What is the most appropriate response strategy to a gaffe or slip-up?
7. Do different situations warrant different response strategies? If yes, why?
8. Can a candidate minimize the damaging effects of a slip-up? If so, how?
9. What is the optimal method or strategy for recovery?
10. What types of useful information does a candidate's handling of a gaffe provide?
11. Are there different tolerance levels or expectations for different types of candidates?

General Line of Questioning (Media's role as referee.)

1. Often the media serve as referee and expose flaws or cracks in a candidate's publicly projected image. Is this an appropriate role? If yes, why?
2. What do you believe the media's role should be?
3. Do the media ever get out of bounds? If yes, how?
4. What is television's influence on this kind of coverage/evaluation?

Specific media-related questions were also developed for former and current presidential candidates and former press secretaries. They included questions such as the following:

For Candidates:

Do you feel the media treated/treats you fairly?

For Press Secretaries; (Jody Powell interview example)

In your book, *The Other Side of the Story*, you state, "Perhaps more important the media also fails to provide the nation with the quantity and quality of reasonably accurate information its citizens need to make the decisions necessary for self-government." Yet according to Mr. Wooten of ABC, Carter managed to give the perception of being an issues-oriented candidate while avoiding taking a real substantive position on most issues. Do the campaign strategists and the candidates, themselves, encourage the media's focus on the personal?

Prepared Detailed Timeline

To keep production on schedule, a timeline was prepared for all phases of production.

Production

Videotaped All Stills

As soon as materials (old magazine covers/recent newspaper headlines/color photographs of candidates/etc.) were obtained, they were videotaped so they would be available when the editing process began. Different techniques were used to record the images to allow for flexibility in the editing process. For example, some shots panned across the image, while others zoomed in or out from the image.

Taped Interviews

All interviews were taped over a two week period in either New York or Washington. The crew included a interviewer, a camera/audio professional and a production assistant. The set-up for each interview took approximately thirty minutes, and the crew made very effort to keep work disruption to a minimum.

Post Production

Transcribed All Interviews

All interviews were transcribed word for word to ensure that all thoughts were recorded. When the tapes had been transcribed they were shared with some members of my thesis committee for review. They reviewed the transcribed interviews and identified the comments they thought had the most relevance and were the most compelling.

Analyzed and Reviewed Tapes

This exercise was undertaken to determine the delivery quality of some of the quotes/sound bites identified. Areas focused on included the audio quality, the speed of delivery, the general physical appearance and the energy-level of the individual delivering the message.

After these sound bites were analyzed, all interviews were viewed several times, to gain a better sense of the overall material and the keys points captured in each interview.

Logged all Relevant Sound Bites

This provided a quick reference point for easy access and gave us a general sense of the program time, with each draft of the script. Logging all significant comments was critical since the goal was to get the production aired and the program, therefore, had a set time limit of 27 minutes. In addition to the actual interviews, it was also necessary to log all the supporting video (B-roll) we had obtained from Vanderbilt Television News Archives and Channel 50 as well as any other video obtained.

The Vanderbilt material included video such as the Ford ethnic blunder; coverage of the Gary Hart and Donna Rice drama; Biden's plagiarism of a Hubert Humphrey speech; Jimmy Carter's "ethnic purity" and "lust in my heart" blunders; Muskie crying; etc. The Channel 50 material included video of the following: past Democratic and Republican National Conventions; Dukakis campaigning and appearing ridiculous in an army tank; Patricia Schroeder crying; a news story on the commercial packaging of George Bush, etc.

Drafted a More Focused Program Outline

Again, the goal was to avoid developing any pre-determined conclusions about the subject matter. This being the case, the specific program content was not outlined until all the interviews were conducted and studied closely. If, for instance, it was determined that these practitioners did not acknowledge the concept of gaffes or blunders, and more specifically, their role in American presidential campaign politics, the program content and its overall message would change significantly. The final program outline was the following:

- I. Open.
- II. Definition of Gaffe of Blunder.
- III. Exploration/Determination of whether voting public and the media are looking for candidates who are perfect are merely straightforward and consistent.
- IV. Exploration/Determination of why the voting public is giving more weight to candidates negative behaviors in their evaluation of presidential candidates. The following reasons are presented:
 - The professionalization of politics. (With the emergence of media consultants, political strategists, and pollsters perhaps the voting public have become suspicious and skeptical about flawless or perfect appearing candidates.)
 - The nature of the medium of politics (presidential campaigns) which is television.
 - The relationship of gaffes to character.
- V. Focus on the incidence and handling of gaffes in presidential elections.
- VI. Providing of perspective by categorizing gaffes and placing them on a continuum of severity.

Drafted Several Versions of Script

Finalized Script

(See Appendix A.)

PROGRAM RESULTS

Introduction—Gaffes: Theoretical Concept or Political Reality?

Both the literature and the program interviews provide considerable support for the idea that gaffes are a political reality to be acknowledged and a force to be contended with during presidential campaigns. While other terms may be used to describe these incidents (blunders, slips, flaws, mistakes, loss of control, negative behaviors, political problems, etc.), the concept or notion is captured quite frequently (especially in academic literature) by the term gaffe.

What was particularly interesting in the interviews is that while all the participants initially defined the term differently, it became apparent as each of the discussions progressed that most were in agreement with respect to when such incidents are legitimate campaign issues.

In addition to the universal acknowledgment of the political reality of gaffes, the degradation process or sequence that usually accompanies these incidents is also widely recognized and understood.

However, the purpose of this degradation process and its importance in voters' evaluation of candidates is not as well understood. While the interviewees identified some instances when this process provides meaningful information on which to evaluate candidates, it was clear that most believe the process is primarily a result of scoop-hungry media and the nature of today's political stage (television)—entertainment.

The following section highlights the points made by the interviewees in the program. It also includes some of their comments that were not part of the program. An asterisk (*) indicates when this is the case.

Differentiating Gaffes: Silly Slips-Ups, Legitimate Campaign Issues or Major Political Problems?

When asked when a gaffe becomes a legitimate campaign issue, **Jody Powell** (Former Press Secretary for President Carter) responded: “If it seems to fly in the face of what is being projected by the candidate, then it needs to be examined to see if it is telling us something about this person that has been kept hidden.”

And while **Jonathan Alter** (Senior Writer for Newsweek) uses different terminology, he also places these negative actions or behaviors on a similar continuum of severity. “I think that some political problems, if you want to use a broader term, resonate and have nine lives because they cut to a character issue. In the case of Ted Kennedy, people thought Chappaquiddick raised a character issue. It was not a temporary consideration; a temporary slip of the tongue.”

Michael Murphy (Media Consultant for Republican Candidates including Bob Dole) “Well I think gaffes are often loose remarks. They can be a harmless loose remarks or something silly like Carter speaking at the Democratic convention and saying ‘Hubert Horatio Hornblower’. I think that is an honest legitimate slip-up. I do not think that is an issue or a story. On the other hand, if somebody makes a racist comment by mistake, or something that is cruel or vindictive, I think that is an issue. I think the Hymie town remark Jesse Jackson made was more than a gaffe. I think that was a legitimate issue.”

Geraldine Ferrarro (Vice-Presidential Candidate)

“I think a gaffe becomes a serious political problem when it puts the person’s ability to lead in question. A gaffe like Joe Biden’s using Neil Kinick’s speech doesn’t really say much about his ability to lead...and when I said, ‘oh you know how Italian men are’, meaning that we are very private people. And oh, what a reaction people had to it. I found the reaction absolutely surprising. I think if it is something like the discussion of President Ford not realizing that Poland was a communist state or George Bush toasting Marcos as a great defender of democracy, I think those are gaffes that have much wider implications. I mean these two guys who were either President or running for President of the United States, do not have the slightest idea what foreign policy is all about.”

Summary

The interviewees (practioners) all defined the term gaffe a bit differently and had a tendency to discuss these incidents in broader terms. It appears that the term “gaffe” has broader meaning, acceptance and use in academic circles. Yet, at the same time, the program participants acknowledged the importance of these negative incidents and behaviors in the assessment of candidates and were able to differentiate them by placing them on a continuum of severity. Simply put, they acknowledge, accept and confirm the existence and importance of the degradation process in the presidential selection process if not the use of the term gaffe.

Handling Gaffes: Part of the Degradation Sequence?

Ron Nessen (V.P. Mutual Radio Network and Former Press Secretary to President Ford)

“We have a ritual in the press and that is any public figure who makes a mistake or gaffe, or what they think is a gaffe, is required to go through this ritual of public confession. You have to admit it publicly. If you acknowledge publicly that you made a mistake, apologize, and then the story goes away. Ford had his problem of Poland and Jimmy Carter had his

problem with the Playboy magazine, saying that ‘I’ve lusted in my heart’. And he had to go through the same ritual which is to stand up in public and say: I am sorry I made a mistake and then it goes away.

“In Ford’s case, there was a late night press briefing after the debate in San Francisco where he made the gaffe. Brent Scowcroft, who was the National Security Council Advisor, was the briefer at that time. If he had said the president made a mistake and asked me to apologize and tell you that he understood. It was a slip of the tongue. He said the wrong thing. He is really sorry, and of course he understood that the Soviet Union dominates Poland. That’s really the only way to minimize these problems—acknowledge them quickly and immediately.”

Mark Lotwis (Assistant Director, Campaign Management Institute) *

“Candidates have to respond when they make a mistake or slip-up. They have to come back and tell the voters and the media what the explanation for the action is. Either they have to deny it, or if it is something they did do and it’s serious enough, usually I would recommend to admit to it and provide an explanation. They have to come out and say: I did it. I am sorry and I am not going to do it again.

“Because I think the voters are smart. They will determine whether it is important enough to them to make them not vote for the candidate. One thing we try to emphasize at the institute is that you should never underestimate the voter. They are real people, they not what is going on and they are really into the character issue.”

Wilma Goldstein (Political Consultant & Director/The American Campaign Academy)

“The recovery process from that shows a lot more about the person, usually at that point, than the actual mistake. I mean we all, everybody knows you make mistakes. The fact that

the Ford campaign, during the 1976 campaign, took two to three days to make a statement about the incident, I think showed some qualities that made people feel uncomfortable about his leadership...When Geraldine Ferraro had that news conference and said, 'I want to talk to you about these accusation and charges.' She met them head on and got a whole lot of credit.

"It's sort of letting people know what kind of stuff are you made of. Are you gutsy? Are you going to be straight? Are you going to be tough? Are you going to deal with issues quickly? That is what I think is really most important about mistakes—how you recover from them, because that is what people really test—what you are going to be like in a job that takes tough, quick decisions."

Summary

In both the literature review and program findings, there is considerable support for the premise that the handling of these negative incidents and behaviors (the degradation process) generates meaningful information on which to evaluate and assess a candidate. In the literature review (see page 9) perhaps Stephen Hess articulates it best by stating, "What you need in office is a man who can cope with situations as they arise...So in place of a checklist we insist that a potential president run an obstacle course...The candidates must make a decision, quickly in full public view. And in watching the candidates in the act of making decisions we are given the opportunity to learn something about them, something that is useful in trying to assess how they might respond to sudden crisis if they were in the White House."

With respect to the interviewees, all parties represented (former press secretaries, current political consultants and strategists as well as analysts and members of the media) are in

agreement with respect to the importance of the handling of such incidents. They also agree that often the handling generates more meaningful information than the actual incident itself.

Focus on the Negative: Partially a Result of Image Making and Manipulation and the Subsequent Need to Test Publicly-Projected Images?

Ron Nessen

“A lot of public figures will tell you the way to make the public stop and re-examine your image, to stop and say hey wait a minute, is do something that is completely out of keeping with that little package that was presented on television. Do something totally out of keeping with that and then people have to stop and re-examine you, and in that re-examination, maybe they get a more accurate picture.”

Jonathan Alter

“I think there are a couple ways gaffes can resonate and take on larger importance. One way is if a candidate does something completely out of character, seemingly different than everything that he or she has been preaching or projecting (image). And then it resonates, because it cuts against the grain about what people understand about that candidate.”

Rob Engle (Media Consultant and Strategist for Democrats)

“Image in politics. For candidates or for political consultants that try to construct images from people that aren’t real, what happens is they become false in front of the public. That does not mean every candidates does it. We have a saying and that is: Do not underestimate the intelligence of the American voters or over-estimate their interest in the American political process. Voters are smart. They will see through any armor, shield, image that is projected by a candidate.”

Richard Armstrong (Author of *The Next Hurrah: The Communications Revolution In American Politics*)

“This whole concept of image is nothing new either. It goes back hundreds of years. Look at Lincoln, for example, who ran in 1860, as a man right out of the Frontier, ‘Old Abe the Log Splitter’, who just walked right out of the woods and right into the White House. That is the way he was portrayed to the American people. But, he was a professional lawyer and had run for office many times. So, we have been creating false images in politics for some time now. The effect of television interestingly enough is that we can’t get away with that stuff the way we used to. Much has been said about the power of television; about the power of the eye that is looking at me right now; about it’s ability to see into my soul and determine whether I am a decent person or not.”

Mark Lotwis

“I think that when you talk about what kind of image you are going to create for a candidate, you are talking about highlighting mainly what qualities they have already. And anytime you try to gloss over, you try to define somebody in a way that they are not truly, it will catch up to you later in the campaign.”

Other Reasons for Degradation Process and Focus on the Negative?

Evaluating Character

Mark Lotwis *

“I think in many ways these matters are more important to them than specific issues—because of their character. And by looking at these things, you can determine whether they are going to do the right thing and not go off and do something wacky.”

Jonathan Alter

“The Presidential selection process has become an initiation, a marathon, a series of tests, or a rite of passage. All of us are placing our lives in the hands of a President. And in the reality of modern day politics, we should scrutinize them as intensely as possibly. But, I think it also reflects experience with previous Presidents, where reporters say to themselves: Why should we and our readers and viewers find out about this guy’s character flaws after he is president? Why not try to find out about them before he is President?”

“Having been through Nixon, Johnson, even some of the lesser character flaws of Carter and Reagan, there was a sense that it was important to find out as much as possible before the person is elected. I would say that the question that most voters ask themselves before they go into the voting booth is a variation on: Do I trust this guy to land the plane safely? Do I think that if there is a rainstorm, he can bring it down safely and we can walk off into the night safely?”

Jody Powell

“Well I think that it was almost inevitable. We had a very turbulent decade and a lot of the controversy had to do with questions about candor and truthfulness and so forth for the high office. And so, in the 1976 election, people were going to be concerned about how a President would behave in circumstances that were above and beyond simple questions of policies. I would also argue that character, in its broadest sense, has been a major part of American elections, particularly in presidential elections...And so, voters, I think to a great extent, basically ask a fairly simple question, but a difficult one which is: Is this the sort of person that I want to turn my business over to and all that it implies.”

The Nature of the Medium of Politics—Television

Jonathan Alter “It is very hard to get a scoop in presidential politics. You essentially have too many reporters chasing too few stories and with too little time and space to explore them in their proper context.”

Ron Nessen “It is much easier to spend your minute on television showing a guy falling down, than it is to spend your minute on television analyzing why we have suddenly dropped into a recession...or what we’re going to do about the energy problems—you know those complex issues.”

“Ford went to deliver his major agricultural speech at Iowa State University and when he began the speech, he said: “I’m really glad to be here at Ohio State,” and then he corrected himself. And that night on television, all the networks showed that trivial slip of the tongue, instead of even a single sentence about his farm policy.”

Jody Powell “And journalists when they are honest, and sometimes we are, will admit that on the whole journalists find issues to be boring. And they also believe with some justification that the American voters find issues boring. And despite all we say as Americans about how we want more information; we want it to be more substantive; we want it to be more specific. When they start to do that, our eyes glaze over, we switch the channel, we flip the page and go on to the next story.”

Michael Murphy “I think it’s to some extent, the specter of entertainment news. If you are in that situation, let’s say you are senior producer for a news network, national news. And you have got a choice between doing a piece of Mike Dukakis slipping on a banana peel today or tripping down the stairs of the campaign plan—you are going to look at the

footage, and you are going to know that ratings determine whether or not your parent company makes money, which is whether or not you get advanced to being executive producer of the news, and you are going to get the banana peel story ready to go. Because news is still the news business. And while the other issues do get some coverage, because there is a lot of journalist ethics involved, there is a show business aspect to it. It is television. There must be funny pictures and gaffes. And gaffes offer good funny pictures.”

Rob Engle “The nature of the medium of politics, which is television, has changed the focus of campaigns more towards the individual than towards the issue. Not just television as in paid media but also in earned media.”

Jesse Jackson “Sometimes the media is not a watchdog, it’s a bulldog. Sometimes it bites people. And, sometimes it does so with blinders on its eyes.”

Richard Armstrong “Satellites are enabling smaller television stations to cover presidential campaigns, where in the past they would have to depend on a network feed. Nowadays, satellites with minicams, with the ability to have what they call a mobile up-link truck in order to film something on the spot, and send it up to the satellite and then back to your local television station...in a small town like San Jose, California or something like that. Enables them to send reporters on the bus with the candidate, enables them to send reports to the presidential campaign. The up-shot, indeed, is that you have got a lot more reporters in this game. And I think that probably does have an effect on them all chasing these little stories.”

Summary

Again, the program observations and findings support the reasons suggested in the literature review for this focus on the negative and the resulting degradation process. The reasons put forth can be summarized in three broad categories, which are all really somewhat interrelated and include:

- ❑ The professionalization of politics (e.g., the emergence of political consultants and image makers) and the resulting need to assess the credibility of a candidate's publicly projected image or persona and to ask ourselves whether or not this person can simply be trusted. In presidential campaigns today the media and the voting public constantly challenge the credibility gap between what candidates say and what they do.
- ❑ In a similar but slightly subtler vein, the increasing importance placed on candidates' character in the evaluation process. Both the literature and the program suggest the importance of finding out about candidates' character flaws before they are elected, and that this focus generally generates more meaningful information about the candidates' than do their issue stands and policy pronouncements.
- ❑ The medium of politics—television.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Background of Evaluations

An objective, diverse committee of professionals was assembled to evaluate how effectively the program tested and explored Bennett's theoretical construct in the "real world." This committee included the following professionals:

Robert Albers is Executive Producer of local programming at WKAR-TV, Michigan State University (MSU) Public Television, and is the Video Specialist on the faculty of the university Department of Telecommunication. He has extensive experience in television production as a producer, director, cameraperson, writer and editor. Mr. Albers also teaches television production at MSU and manages the video production facilities for the Telecommunication Department. He has produced and directed documentaries, directed multi-camera orchestra programs, and worked extensively in public affairs programming. In addition, he has served as the executive producer of governmental affairs programs as well as programs concerning sports and the arts—with many programs receiving awards and widespread distribution, both nationally and internationally. His awards include two regional Emmy nominations and a PACEmaker Award of Excellence in 1990. He has received numerous others over the past decade including recognition at the American Film Festival and the Athens Film and Video Festival. He also is active as a consultant and independent producer/director.

Donovan Reynolds is the Executive Producer of *Michigan At Risk*, a public television series exploring key issues affecting the state. The series is now in its fourth season. Reynolds is also the Executive Director and chief political correspondent for MPRN. As the first Executive Director of the network, he has provided leadership in guiding its rapid growth. Organized in 1984, MPRN has expanded from a one-person operation to a

full-fledged news organization with bureaus in Detroit and Lansing and special reporting units covering the arts, humanities, business and economics.

Before returning to Michigan, Mr. Reynolds was the Executive Director of California Public Radio in San Francisco. He has won several major media awards, including the Armstrong Award for Excellence in FM Broadcasting, local program awards from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and United Press International awards from investigative and feature reporting.

Lisa Whiting is a producer/director with WKAR-TV – a public television station affiliated with Michigan State University. In this role, she serves as the producer/editor for *Michigan At Risk* – A documentary series developed by Michigan Public Broadcasting and distributed to public television stations throughout the state. She also is the producer/director of numerous other programs for broadcast on WKAR-TV. Many of her programs have received national awards. Ms. Whiting has a M.A. in Telecommunications with an emphasis on video production.

Please note: Before viewing the program, all evaluators were given and asked to review a brief overview of the theoretical construct to be tested, the primary and secondary objectives of the program, and evaluation guidelines and criteria (See Appendix B).

General Comments Regarding Program Content and Message

Observation

It was apparent that the subject matter was thoroughly researched and analyzed. A well-thought out and founded historical perspective was provided. The quantity and quality of examples (candidate's gaffes and blunders) helped to enhance and support this perspective.

Response

Every attempt was made to identify, locate, and obtain concrete examples of the types of incidents to be discussed to help the audience better understand the program content.

Observation

The existence of the gaffe and the press' emphasis on it is clearly presented, but the actual impact on the campaign is never discussed. What happened to Ford after the Poland gaffe—did he lose ground on the polls? Has the impact actually been assessed? In which cases did the gaffe or gaffes make a difference? Why? In which cases did the candidates control the impact and move forward? How did they do it?

Response

While there are indirect references to the impact of specific gaffe's on campaigns (e.g. the many references to Ford's Poland blunder, the handling of that blunder, and the fact that it became a major campaign issue), the program would have been enhanced by the use of concrete examples and such an analysis. While the decision to limit narration partially impacted our ability to include such an analysis, this aobservation lso reveals an area of weakness in our pre-production reserach and preparation.

Observation

Overall, the program content was fairly clear—to examine/explore the role of gaffes in our evaluation of presidential candidates and how the media have facilitated and encouraged the voters' interest in and focus on these incidents. The message became somewhat blurred with the introduction of image manipulation and consultants and the new technologies in television.

Perhaps the program tried to address too many issues. While the link of image making and manipulation to gaffes is understood, it introduces a topic which warrants additional and separate study. The medium of television is not suited for exploring issues in any great detail and demands a simple storyline. Realistically, a program should not attempt to achieve too many objectives.

Response

More narration throughout the program might have helped to more effectively communicate the intended program content and message. In addition, perhaps a longer program (one hour versus 30 minute program) would have better accommodated the issues to be covered.

Observation

The program does a good job of presenting and weaving together various points of view and personal reactions to mistakes and problems.

Response

Every attempt was made to let the material tell the story and not to force our perspective or interpretation on the viewers. The representation of the media, campaign consultants and strategists, candidates and primary advisors to candidates contributed to the program's objectiveness.

Observation

The combination of archival footage and interviews with well know politicians is effective. But two perspectives that are either missing or underrepresented are those of the voter and the media, respectively. Questions which need to be addressed include: Why did the media emphasize specific incidents? How did this emphasis impact voters?

Response

With respect to the media, there is no doubt that this group should have been better represented. While Jonathan Alter, a senior writer with *Newsweek* represented the print media's viewpoint, Ron Nessen (V.P. for West Mutual One Radio Network and a former reporter for a major network) probably better represented the perspective of a candidate's former press secretary than as a former member of the broadcast media. Attempts, however, were made to secure interviews with prominent national broadcast media figures but, unfortunately these attempts were unsuccessful.

Observation

All program evaluators strongly agreed the program was provocative and entertaining and had commercial appeal. One evaluator noted that he is a political junkie, and even with this being the case, he still found the subject matter to be interesting and intriguing. They all also strongly agreed that the program held their attention, was visually pleasing, used archival video effectively and had a professional appearance.

Response

While the subject matter itself has much commercial appeal because it concerns political characters and their flaws and is pictorially interesting, the interviewees also contributed significantly to the entertainment value of the program. They represented diverse interests and groups and most were very animated in their discussions.

Observation

Using a documentary format, you need to take a firm position and make a strong statement at the onset of a program, and then you build a case to defend that position. The exploratory nature—bringing in all viewpoints to ensure fairness—is more suited for a news program format. This program presented too many viewpoints.

Response

The primary goal of the program was to test and explore an academic or theoretical construct in the real world and not to edit the material to construct a pre-conceived argument or case. Perhaps a documentary was not the most appropriate format for the subject matter.

Observation

The introduction was too brief and abrupt. There needs to be a better defining of the issue to be examined at the beginning of the program. A detailed example and description of one such an incident or gaffe in the introduction would have helped viewers to better understand the program content. By taking one gaffe, for example, and explaining what occurred, how it was defined and formulated into a campaign issue, and how it was responded to by the media and the candidate at the beginning of the program would effectively communicate to the viewers the program content and intent.

As with the introduction, the close could have been much stronger. The narrator should have closed the program by telling viewers what they had seen and the implications of the information which was presented.

Response

Again, our goal was to let the material tell the story and not to force our interpretation on the viewers through the use of narration. Simply put, it was to use more of a cinema verite documentary format. In retrospect, however, additional narration would have enhanced the program by connecting ideas, providing more focus to the program, and generally guiding the viewer more selectively through a rather complex issue.

Observation

The interviews were all excellent and it appeared that a good rapport had been established with most of the participants. They obviously took the interviewer seriously.

Response

While there was not much time immediately before the interview (while we were setting-up) to establish rapport with the participants, earlier communication and well-thought out questions (with the assistance of a committee) helped us to gain credibility with these individuals.

Evaluation of Program Objectives

The specific program objectives (cognitive/affective/behavioral) are outlined in the first section of this document (see page 28). The program evaluators reviewed these objectives immediately before viewing the program.

Observation

With respect to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives of the program, the evaluators concluded the following: the cognitive objectives were met but the affective and behavioral objectives were not. They also concluded that an unrealistic number of objectives were set for a half-hour television program and indicated that most programs are fortunate to achieve one behavioral objective.

Response

The objectives for the program were identified early in the process and, unfortunately, were never re-evaluated in a formal manner after that time—with the exception of the cognitive objectives, which were constantly challenged and considered. Few would dispute the contention that even one behavioral objective is ambitious.

Evaluation of Production Quality*Observation*

Overall production quality was good. The program pace, the excellent shot composition and the use of transitions enhanced the program and helped to hold viewers' attention. The use of archival video helped pacing and transitions.

Response

A deliberate attempt was made to keep the sound bites (quotes) brief, and generally no longer than 30 seconds. We also obtained and used as much supporting video (B-roll) as possible. Supporting video included archival footage, video obtained from a few news stations and still shots. All these efforts were undertaken in an effort to enhance the pacing of the program and to help create smooth transitions or edits.

Observation

The only major criticism of the production quality relates to some aspects of the audio. The use of natural sound would have helped to make transitions more natural and less abrupt. In addition, the audio levels were not matched properly and that also contributed to some of the abruptness of the edits or transitions. And finally, there was some audio “hiss.”

Observation

It was difficult to read keys (chyron type/participants names and titles). Shading behind keys could have solved this problem.

Response

To avoid awkward, obtrusive names and titles, we opted to use a light color, yellow, and smaller fonts. We also were trying to create a production with commercial appeal that met industry standards to increase our chances of getting it aired. At the time, most national programs were using yellow and moving away from obtrusive colors like white. Several attempts were made to use shading but the technology available to us created a rather undesirable effect.

Observation

In the archival video shots, there was a pole through the talking heads.

Response

Unfortunately a graphic had to be designed to cover the time code at the top of the archival video. Due to time and budgetary constraints, we were unable to secure original video from the networks. We tried to create a graphic which would resemble a television screen and that would make the camouflaging of the code less apparent. After investing much effort and time into this task—and to little or no avail, we opted to use the graphic, as seen in the program.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the role of gaffes in presidential election campaigns and thereby to test Bennett's contention that gaffes are the basis of clearly identifiable degradation rituals and that these rituals contribute to the meaning and purpose of campaigns and to the information needs of voters.

The results of the program and the evaluations indicate that while the cognitive objectives were met to some extent, none of the affective and behavioral objectives were achieved. With respect to the cognitive objectives, the following can be concluded: While the program clarified some of the criteria (including the incidents and handling of gaffes) that are being used by the voting public to evaluate candidates, it by no means provided evidence of the most frequently used or the most meaningful criteria for such evaluations. The program also presented insight into the type of meaningful information that the focus on candidates' gaffes and the handling of them can provide; whether other viewpoints presented in this program dilute the strength of this case is debatable. And finally, while the program did discuss the media's role and impact on how we evaluate candidates, the findings are somewhat skewed (due to factors discussed later in this chapter) and therefore any interpretation of this information cannot be considered to be conclusive.

A general interpretation of the program findings suggest that while practitioners (interviewees) do acknowledge the concept and role of gaffes and the resulting degradation sequences and rituals they often initiate, they attribute greater blame than expected on the media for the increasing emphasis on these gaffe incidents (blunders, loss of control, negative behaviors, or revelation of character flaws) and the handling of them. This is not surprising when it is coming from the mouths of those who have directly or indirectly experienced this degradation process (former presidential candidates, press secretaries and

campaign consultants and strategists). It is, however, somewhat surprising to hear the same sentiments echoed by some members of the media and the academic community.

The program results also indicate that some of these incidents are legitimate campaign issues; and when they are, the degradation process that follows often provides meaningful and useful information for the evaluation of candidates. While none of the interviewees refer directly to the phrase “degradation process,” they refer to campaign stress and character tests and the concept of being initiated into office or power. Further evidence of this indirect acknowledgment of the degradation process is provided in the discussion of the importance and significance of the handling of these incidents. One interviewee, Wilma Goldstein, even goes as far to say that, “the recovery process shows a lot more about the person, usually, than the actual mistake.”

Yet, at the same time, the interviewees suggest that gaffes are often a trivial preoccupation of a scoop-hungry press. These conflicting views and opinions may be attributed in part to the use of the term gaffe rather than approaching the issue from the broader perspective of campaign issues/problems (offending behaviors/indiscretions) and degradation rituals.

Comments from both program participants and evaluators suggest that the use of the term “gaffe” was limiting and confusing. Simply put, because the term has different meanings in different circles (academic vs. political worlds), it probably confused the program issue and skewed responses to some extent. Since the term gaffe frequently connotes a trivial slip of the tongue or a silly mistake in the “real world,” it is highly likely that the use of the term contributed to the universal finger-pointing at the media. The significant discussion of the media’s impact and role prevented greater discussion on the meaning and purpose of the degradation process and its usefulness in our evaluations of presidential candidates.

In addition to the decision to use the term gaffe, other possible influential factors on the results include the following: the program format and the decision to limit narration; the broad, complex subject matter and the medium's ability to accommodate it; and most importantly, the under-representation of members of the media—particularly members of the broadcast media, and the voting public.

The limited media representation and the lack of the voter perspective dilute the program's effectiveness in providing a thorough and balanced analysis and program. By better representing and including these perspectives, it is my belief that the program would have provided greater insight into the meaning and purpose of contemporary presidential election campaigns—and how great a role gaffes, and the degradation process they often initiate, play in the casting of kingmaker.

Moreover, while much has been written about the media's ability to manipulate voters perceptions and beliefs about candidates, little has been written about the candidates' ability to directly manipulate and impact news stories (not just forms of paid media messages). Since the 1988 presidential campaign, however, there has been greater discussion about the candidates' manipulation of the news media and the associated, inherent dangers. This is an important perspective that strengthens the case for the need to carefully observe and evaluate candidates on the basis of the validity of their publicly-projected images, through an assessment of their actions and behaviors—especially their negative ones. This aspect of modern presidential campaigns should be factored into any further study on the subject matter.

The importance of this issue is reflected in the following remarks:

“More recently, at least one major network has announced plans to use its control over the airwaves to influence how presidential candidates conduct their campaigns.

Disturbed at the manipulation of their campaign coverage by the 1988 presidential candidates, ABC News announced that henceforth candidate “photo opportunities,” such as Bush’s infamous visit to a New Jersey flag factory or Michael Dukakis’s ride in an Army tank, will not appear on the television evening news unless the candidate is willing to submit to reporters’ questions” (Buchanan, 1991; pg. 63).

“Political professionals have gotten media management down to such a science that the form of the message is often all that distinguishes one information fragment from the another. All campaign messages have come to look and sound like political advertisements. Staging, scripting, and directing have become the order of the day. Morrow sums up this situation in a reaction to the 1988 presidential campaign: ‘The year represents something close to a dismantling of the American presidential campaign. The candidate perform simulations of encounters with the real world, but the exercise is principally a series of television visuals of staged events created for TV cameras’ “ (Owen, 1991; pg. 174).

To further diffuse the argument that the media is the only responsible party in determining how and what information we use to evaluate our presidential candidates, Bennett argues that people have a choice about where they get their information (which type of media) and if they so desire they can shift their reliance from one source of information (medium) to another; and that, “each individual has a personal stake in thinking critically about events in the news and in forming an independent perspective on the political world” (1988; pg. 208).

These political practitioners and the voting public might also be less cynical about the process and more likely to view the selection criteria in a positive light if they reflected on recent findings which suggest that, “A candidate’s rhetorical style and substance are reflexively related: one reinforces the other and that issue and image are inseparable” (Hinck, 1993; pg. 228). Particular exchanges or patterns of responses often reveal valuable information about a candidate’s character and leadership ability. And this being the case, it can be concluded that candidates’ gaffes and their response to these incidents, provide meaningful and critical information about them. This perspective presented by Hinck and others should also be tested and explored further in any follow-up study on the issue.

With this perspective in mind, the following questions beg to be asked: If we had analyzed, for example, Clinton's rhetorical style more closely—his slick, evasive and non-committal presentation manner—and his responses to gaffe incidents and problems, would we have been better able to predict his handling of such difficult situations as the Near Waco incident? If he was not straightforward about the draft and smoking of marijuana issues, how could we expect him to be straightforward about Near Waco and accept responsibility for his decision and the resulting loss of lives? And more critically, what does his rhetorical response and handling of all of these incidents simply say about his character?

In concluding, the results of this program should be viewed as a first step in gaining a better understanding of this form of candidate evaluation and as an initial confirmation of its relevance in the "real world." In addition to certain deficiencies of analysis already discussed, it should be noted that the findings presented in this study (both the literature review and the actual program) are grounded more on historical accounts and interpretations and some hard data generated by polls and surveys, than on findings from well-constructed, controlled studies. This method of evaluation and what it implies about the purpose of presidential elections, therefore, deserves further analysis and study.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Fatal Detractions: The Role of Gaffes in Presidential Elections Video Script

Video

Shot of crowd cheering at a National Political Convention (B-ROLL)
Title superimposed over video:
"Fatal Detractions: The Role of Gaffes in Presidential Elections"

Medium close-up of the narrator

Close-up of narrator:

Audio

Music full – Huey Lewis' convention.
Title "Perfect World"

Music under Narrator: CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS OFTEN TRY TO PRESENT THE IMAGE OF A PERFECT CANDIDATE LIVING IN A PERFECT WORLD. THEY PAY POLITICAL CONSULTANTS EXORBITANT FEES TO ACHIEVE A PERFECT LOOK. THEY LEARN TO SPEAK IN PERFECT 30-SECOND BITES. AND GENERALLY, WE BUY INTO THESE FEEL-GOOD IMAGES. WE WANT TO BELIEVE OUR KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR HAS ARRIVED.

Narrator: BUT OFTEN THAT IMAGE IS CRACKED OPEN WHEN A CANDIDATE COMMITS A GAFFE OR REVEALS A CHARACTER FLAW. AND THEN IT SEEMS AS IF THE VOTING PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA PULL OUT A MAGNIFYING GLASS AND LOOK FOR EVERY TRIVIAL MISTAKE AND EVERY SLIGHT FLAW. WHY? WHAT PURPOSE DOES THIS FOCUS SERVE? WE ASKED OURSELVES THAT EXACT QUESTION EIGHT MONTHS AGO

**WHEN WE SET OUT TO EXPLORE
THE ROLE OF GAFFES IN
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.**

**Shots of Dukakis and others dancing and
celebrating. Super of the title:
"Fatal Detractions: The Role of Gaffes in
Presidential Elections" (B-ROLL)**

Same music full

**Medium close-up of George Bush
(B-ROLL) Super of same title**

**Music under
George Bush: "I MADE A GOOD
SELECTION. AND, I'VE NEVER
SEEN SUCH A POUNDING, AN
UNFAIR POUNDING ON A YOUNG
SENATOR IN MY ENTIRE LIFE."**

**Close-up of Gerald Ford (B-ROLL)
Super of same title**

**Gerald Ford: "I DON'T BELIEVE
THAT THE RUMANIANS CONSIDER
THEMSELVES DOMINATED BY THE
SOVIET UNION. I DON'T BELIEVE
THAT THE POLES CONSIDER
THEMSELVES DOMINATED BY THE
SOVIET UNION."**

**Close-up of Jimmy Carter (B-ROLL)
Super of same title**

**Jimmy Carter: "I HAVE NOTHING
AGAINST A COMMUNITY THAT'S
MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE
POLISH, OR WHO ARE
CZECHOSLOVAKIANS, OR WHO
ARE FRENCH CANADIANS, OR
WHO ARE BLACKS, FROM TRYING
TO MAINTAIN AN ETHNIC PURITY
OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD."**

Close-up of Pat Schroeder (B-ROLL)

Music full

**Shot of Michael Dukakis riding in
army tank (B-ROLL)**

**Music under
Narrator: THESE ARE WHAT
CAMPAIGN ANALYSTS CALL
CAMPAIGN GAFFES, MISTAKES OR
BLUNDERS; AND WHEN A
CAMPAIGN FAILS, WHEN IT
COMES TO AN ABRUPT END, THE
BLAME IS OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO
A FATAL GAFFE OR FLAW. YET,**

**SOME MISTAKES OR BLUNDERS
EITHER BOUNCE OFF OR
ACTUALLY HELP CANDIDATES BY
MAKING THEM SEEM MORE
HUMAN.**

**Medium close-up of Ron Nessen (B-ROLL)
Super: Former Press Sec. Ford
Administration**

**Music out
Ron Nessen: "YOU LOOK AT
REAGAN'S MANY, MANY GAFFES
AND FAILURES OF MEMORY AND
MISSTATED FACTS AND SO FORTH,
AND THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO
CHANGE THE AFFECTION IN
WHICH VOTERS HELD REAGAN."**

Still picture of Ronald Reagan's face

**Ronald Reagan: "MY FELLOW
AMERICANS, I'M PLEASED TO TELL
YOU TODAY THAT I SIGNED
LEGISLATION THAT WILL OUTLAW
RUSSIA FOREVER. WE BEGIN
BOMBING IN FIVE MINUTES."**

**Medium close-up of Michael
Murphy Super: Michael Murphy/
Republican Media Consultant**

**Michael Murphy: "HE'S WIRED-UP
FOR A MICROPHONE, JUST LIKE I
WAS TODAY, AND THE FIRST
THING THEY ASK YOU TO DO IS TO
SPEAK, YOU KNOW, COUNT
BACKWARDS TO TEST THE
MICROPHONE. SO, HE WANTS TO
SAY SOMETHING FUNNY TO MAKE
EVERYBODY LAUGH...HE
SAYS,"WE BEGIN BOMBING IN
FIVE MINUTES." HE SAID IT
HUMOROUSLY 'CAUSE THAT'S
THE LEAST, LAST THING IN THE
WORLD YOU EXPECT THE
PRESIDENT TO SAY."**

Medium close-up of Ron Nessen

**Ron Nessen: "PEOPLE REALLY LIKED
WHAT REAGAN WAS DOING IN
POLICY TERMS. YOU KNOW, THEY
LIKED HAVING THEIR TAXES CUT.
THEY LIKED STANDING UP TO THE
RUSSIANS. THEY LIKED LESS
GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF
THEIR LIVES. SO, AS LONG AS HE**

MADE PROGRESS ON THESE BIG, MAJOR POLICY ISSUES IN WHICH PEOPLE AGREED WITH HIM, THEY WERE WILLING TO FORGET THE GAFFES AND THE MISTAKES."

Close-up of Jonathan Alter
Super: Jonathan Alter/Senior
Writer, Newsweek

Jonathan Alter: "VOTERS ARE CLEARLY NOT LOOKING FOR PERFECTION, AND IN SOME WAYS, A GAFFE CAN BE A BIT HUMANIZING."

Close-up of Wall Street Journal
headline and shots of magazine article
headlines

Narrator: WHILE IT'S TRUE SOME GAFFES HUMANIZE CANDIDATES, OTHERS DELIVER A DEATH BLOW. AND UNFORTUNATELY, THE IMPACT OF A GAFFE ON A CAMPAIGN IS NOT YET KNOWN. WHAT IS KNOWN, THOUGH, IS THAT THE VOTING PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA WILL JUMP ON A GAFFE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT'S BEEN MADE.

Three shot with Barbara Walters
and Jesse Jackson Courtesy
super: CBS News (B-ROLL)

Barbara Walters: "DID YOU CALL ANY NEW YORK OR NEW YORK JEWS, HYMIES, OR NEW YORK, HYMIETOWN OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT?"

Close-up of Jesse Jackson Jesse Jackson
(B-ROLL)

"I HAVE NO RECOLLECTION OF THAT, AND FURTHERMORE..."

Close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "GAFFES ARE OFTEN LOOSE REMARKS. IF IT'S A HARMLESS LOOSE REMARK OR SOMETHING SILLY...CARTER SPEAKING AT THE '84 DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION AND 'HUBERT HORATIO HORNBLLOWER'. I THINK THAT'S AN HONEST, LEGITIMATE SLIP-UP. I DO NOT THINK THAT IS A STORY."

Medium close-up of Ron Nessen

Ron Nessen: "I THINK FORD HAD THE IMAGE OF A BUMBLER. THERE WERE THESE PICTURES OF HIM FALLING WHILE HE WAS SKIING. TRIPPING ON STEPS WHEN HE GOT OFF A PLANE IN AUSTRIA. SLIPPING ON THE ICE IN THE ROSE GARDEN. MAKING VERBAL GAFFES AND SO FORTH. AND I THINK HE, ALSO, WAS SOMEWHAT VICTIMIZED BY LYNDON JOHNSON'S FAMOUS CRACK ABOUT GERRY FORD CAN'T WALK AND CHEW GUM AT THE SAME TIME."

Close-up of Geraldine Ferraro
Super: Geraldine Ferraro/Former Vice-Presidential Candidate

Geraldine Ferraro: "I WATCHED PAT SCHROEDER WHEN SHE WENT INTO THE RACE. THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO TREAT HER ANY DIFFERENTLY, EXCEPT WHEN SHE MADE HER ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE END THAT SHE WAS GOING TO WITHDRAW FROM THE RACE. I WAS TERRIBLY FRUSTRATED. ALL PEOPLE SEEMED TO DO WAS FOCUS ON THE TEARS."

Close-up of Ron Nessen

Narrator: BUT SOME SAY THE NATURE OF CAMPAIGNING TODAY MAKES IT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR A CANDIDATE TO REMAIN GAFFE FREE.

Shots of Michael Dukakis, George Bush
Al Gore and Paul Simon talking to the press
(B-ROLL)

Ron Nessen: "I MEAN, YOU CONSIDER THESE GUYS ARE OUT TALKING EVERYDAY MAKING SEVEN, EIGHT, TEN SPEECHES A DAY. THE CAMERAS ARE CONSTANTLY RUNNING. THE MICROPHONES ARE CONSTANTLY RUNNING . I MEAN, OBVIOUSLY, EVERYBODY S GOING TO MAKE A SLIP OF THE TONGUE SOMETIME, HAVE A LAPSE OF MEMORY. UNDER THAT KIND OF

PRESSURE...THERE'S A LOT OF FATIGUE DURING A CAMPAIGN. NOT ENOUGH SLEEP, NOT ENOUGH PREPARATION TIME. IT'S A WONDER THERE AREN'T MORE GAFFES, REALLY."

Close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "YOU CAN GO UP TO FIVE WEEKS OF ANSWERING EVERY QUESTION PERFECTLY FROM ALL ISSUES AND ALL AREAS AND EVERYTHING, ONE LITTLE TWO- SECOND SLIP-UP WITH FIVE CAMERAS ON IT AND BING!, THAT'S THE ONLY NATIONAL STORY THAT PEOPLE HEAR. SO, THE TEST IS ALWAYS HAPPENING AND BECAUSE THE CAMERAS ARE ALWAYS ON, IT'S HARD TO ALWAYS PASS WITHOUT A GAFFE OR A MISTAKE OR SOME KIND."

Close-up of Joseph Powell
Super: Joseph Powell/Former Press Secretary Carter Administration

Joseph Powell: "CLEARLY AMERICANS DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION AND I THINK THEY TEND TO BE, ON THE WHOLE, REASONABLY TOLERANT ABOUT THIS AND WE MAY BE TOO TOLERANT ABOUT SOME ASPECTS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR."

Shots of Jesse Jackson shaking hands in a crowd (B-ROLL)

Narrator: BUT CANDIDATES SAY THEY'RE ONLY HUMAN AND THEREFORE, THEY WILL ERROR AND FALL SHORT OF PERFECTION.

Close-up of Jesse Jackson
Super: Rev. Jesse Jackson/
Former Presidential Candidate

Jesse Jackson: "PEOPLE WHO ARE RUNNING FOR PUBLIC OFFICE, AND ASKING FOR PUBLIC TRUST MUST HAVE INTEGRITY. THEY MUST LIVE A LIFE THEY SING AND PREACH ABOUT IN THEIR SONG. EVEN WITH YOUR HIGHEST INTENTIONS, ALL PEOPLE HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF PERFECTION AND OF THE GLORY OF GOD. AND SO, I HAVE SEEN THE

PEOPLE FORGIVE CANDIDATES WHO MADE ERRORS. I HAVE SEEN THE MEDIA FORGIVE WHAT IT CHOOSES TO FORGIVE. I'M ONLY SAYING THERE MUST BE SOME SENSE OF HEALTHY BALANCE. I DO NOT KNOW OF ANY PERFECT PUBLIC OFFICIAL OR PERFECT VOTERS WHO VOTED FOR THEM."

Close-up of Robert Engel
Super: Robert Engel/Democratic
Media Consultant

Robert Engel: "PEOPLE ARE HUMAN. I THINK THAT'S SOMETIMES THE BEST ASPECTS AND ELEMENTS OF A CANDIDATE IS TO SHOW THEM AS THEY REALLY ARE."

Still shots of magazine headlines

Narrator: REASON TELLS US THAT TO BLUNDER OR GAFFE IS HUMAN. YET WE DON'T ALWAYS FORGIVE AND FORGET. WHILE WE'RE WILLING TO FORGET SOME MISTAKES, WE CLEARLY REMEMBER OTHERS."

Close-up of Joseph Powell

Joseph Powell: "THIS IS A VERY SUBJECTIVE SORT OF THING, BUT IF IT DOES SEEM TO FLY IN THE FACE OF WHAT IS BEING PROJECTED BY THAT CANDIDATE, THEN IT NEEDS TO BE EXAMINED TO SEE IF IT IS TELLING US SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PERSON THAT'S BEEN KEPT HIDDEN."

Medium close-up of Jonathan Alter

Jonathan Alter: "THERE ARE TWO WAYS IN WHICH A GAFFE CAN RESONATE AND CAN TAKE ON LARGER IMPORTANCE. THE FIRST IS, IF IT REFLECTS SOMETHING THAT THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS HAS BELIEVED TO BE TRUE ABOUT A PARTICULAR POLITICIAN, BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE A HOOK IN WHICH TO HANG IT. AND SUDDENLY, THE POLITICIAN SAYS

SOMETHING THAT ALLOWS THEM TO USE IT AS SORT OF A SHORT HAND TO CONVEY A POINT THAT THEY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CONVEY IN A MORE GENERAL WAY FOR A LONG TIME."

Medium shot of Gary Hart (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: ABC News

Narrator: IN THE CASE OF GARY HART, FOR EXAMPLE, HE PROJECTED THE IMAGE OF THE GOOD FAMILY MAN. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS CAUGHT WOMANIZING. AND IN A SIMILAR CASE, BIDEN, WHILE PROJECTING THE IMAGE OF CANDOR AND BREEZY SPONTANEITY WAS FOUND TO BE TAKING LINES FROM THE MOUTHS OF OTHERS.

Close-up of Hubert Humphrey (B-ROLL)
Super: Hubert Humphrey/Former Vice President/ABC News/July 1976

Hubert Humphrey: "FIRST, THOSE WHO ARE IN THE DAWN OF LIFE ARE CHILDREN. SECOND, THOSE WHO ARE IN THE SHADOWS OF LIFE ARE ELDERLY, ARE SICK, ARE NEEDY, ARE HANDICAPPED. AND THOSE, THIRD, IN THE TWILIGHT OF LIFE ARE ELDERLY..."

Dissolve to a close-up of Joseph Biden (B-ROLL)
Super: Nov. 1985

Joseph Biden: "...A NATION NOBLE ENOUGH TO TREAT THOSE IN THE DAWN OF LIFE WITH LOVE, THOSE IN THE DUSK OF LIFE WITH CARE, AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF LIFE WITH COMPASSION."

Close-up of Jonathan Alter

Jonathan Alter: "IF THE CANDIDATE DOES SOMETHING THAT IS SEEMINGLY COMPLETELY OUT OF CHARACTER, SEEMINGLY DIFFERENT THAN EVERYTHING HE OR SHE HAS BEEN PREACHING; AND THEN IT ALSO RESONATES BECAUSE IT CUTS AGAINST THE GRAIN OF WHAT PEOPLE UNDERSTAND ABOUT THAT CANDIDATE."

Medium close-up of Joseph Powell

Joseph Powell: "THE CLASSIC CASE OF THAT IN THE '76 CAMPAIGN WAS THE SO CALLED "LUST IN MY HEART" QUOTE IN WHICH A THEN GOVERNOR CARTER WAS ATTEMPTING TO EXPLAIN TO, OF ALL PEOPLE, A PLAYBOY REPORTER THE BIBLICAL INJUNCTION AGAINST BEING SELF- RIGHTEOUS, WHICH I SUSPECT IS A LESSON THAT OUGHT TO BE EXPLAINED AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO ALL OF US. BUT HE USED THE BIBLICAL PHRASE ABOUT LUST IN ONE'S HEART."

**Close-up of an ABC News anchor (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: ABC News**

Anchor: "CHRIST, HE NOTED, SAID THAT LOOKING AT A WOMAN LUSTFULLY CONSTITUTES ADULTERY IN THE HEART. ON THAT BASIS, SAYS CARTER, HE HAS COMMITTED MANY ADULTERIES IN HIS HEART, AND HE HOPES HE'S BEEN FORGIVEN."

Close-up of man (voter) giving his opinion (B-ROLL)

Man: "...AND THE THING THAT DISTURBS ME MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IS THAT I'M AFRAID THAT THE LANGUAGE HE USED IS GOING TO DISTRACT FROM THE POINT THAT HE WAS TRYING TO GET ACROSS."

**Close-up of Tom Brokaw (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: NBC News**

Tom Brokaw: "WHEN FERRARRO TOLD REPORTERS THAT HER HUSBAND, JOHN ZACCARO, WOULD NOT DISCLOSE HIS INCOME TAX RETURN, SHE ADDED AND QUOTE: "YOU PEOPLE MARRIED TO ITALIAN MEN. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE."

Close-up of Geraldine Ferraro

Geraldine Ferraro: "WHAT A REACTION PEOPLE HAD TO IT. I FOUND THE REACTION ABSOLUTELY SURPRISING. I FOUND IT MIND BOGGLING THAT SOME ITALIAN MEN WOULD ACTUALLY THINK THAT THAT WAS AN INSULT."

Shots of Geraldine Ferraro with her husband (B-ROLL) Still shot of Ferraro on the cover of a magazine, and a *USA Today* headline.

Narrator: THAT GAFFE, LIKE CARTER'S "LUST IN MY HEART" QUOTE, TOOK ON LARGER IMPORTANCE BECAUSE IT CUT AGAINST THE GRAIN OF WHAT PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD ABOUT HER. ABOUT HER PRIDE IN HER ETHNIC HERITAGE AND HER IMMIGRANT PARENTS. BUT WHETHER AGAINST THE GRAIN OR TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER, CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS WILL INEVITABLY TRY TO CONTROL THE DAMAGE.

Close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS NOW THERE IS A WHOLE JARGON; AND THERE ARE SPINNING ROOMS WHERE YOU SEND YOUR CAMPAIGN ADVISORS TO MEET WITH THE MEDIA AND GIVE THEM YOUR SIDE OF THE STORY; AND SPIN PATROLS ARE THE PEOPLE YOU SEND AFTER AN EVENT TO TALK TO THE MEDIA FROM YOUR CAMPAIGN. SO, IT'S A WHOLE SCIENCE ON HOW YOU DEAL WITH THE PRESS."

Close-up of Ron Nessen

Ron Nessen: "GAFFES ARE ONE THING. HOW YOU HANDLE GAFFES ARE ANOTHER THING. AND I THINK THE FASTEST WAY TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE OF A GAFFE IS TO SAY, 'BOY, DID I BLOW THAT ONE, WHEW! DID I MAKE A MISTAKE! I'M REALLY SORRY, BUT THAT WAS TERRIBLE. I'M SORRY.'" AND IT GOES AWAY."

Close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "I THINK THE HYMIETOWN REMARK JESSE JACKSON MADE WAS MORE THAN A GAFFE. I THINK THAT WAS A LEGITIMATE ISSUE. AND I THINK, FRANKLY, HE HAD TO FACE IT, I THINK HE HANDLED IT. AND I THINK HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO MOVE ON."

Close-up of Jesse Jackson (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: CBS News

Jesse Jackson: "FIRST OF ALL, I'M NOT ANTI-SEMITIC..."

Medium close-up of Jesse Jackson (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: CBS News

Jesse Jackson: "THE ONLY RECOLLECTION I HAVE OF THIS BEING USED AS A CHILD, WAS USED IN A NON-DEROGATORY FASHION. EVEN THEN, IT WAS NOT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR ME."

Full screen of "Paid by the Kennedy for President Committee"
Super: CBS News and Kennedy commercial

Voice over Ted Kennedy: "I, ALONE, FEEL IN MY CONSCIENCE THE LOSS OF MARY JO KOPECHNE'S LIFE, AND THE FAILURE TO REPORT THE ACCIDENT IMMEDIATELY. I CARRY THAT BURDEN WITH SORROW AND REGRET."

Dissolve to Medium close-up of the senator (B-ROLL)

Shot of Gerald Ford giving a speech
(B-ROLL)

Gerald Ford: "LAST NIGHT IN THE DEBATE, I SPOKE OF AMERICA'S FIRM SUPPORT FOR THE ASPIRATION FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE NATIONS OF EASTERN EUROPE. THE UNITED STATES HAS NEVER CONCEDED AND NEVER WILL CONCEDE THEIR DOMINATION BY THE SOVIET UNION. WE DO NOT ACCEPT FOREIGN DOMINATION OVER ANY NATION, PERIOD."

Shot of Jimmy Carter giving a speech
(B-ROLL)

Jimmy Carter: "MOST OF THE PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY MY ILL-CHOSEN AGREEMENT TO USE OF WORDS – ETHNIC PURITY. I DO NOT, EVER...I THINK THAT WAS A VERY SERIOUS MISTAKE ON MY PART."

Close-up of Wilma Golstein
Super: Wilma Golstein/Political
Strategist Director ACA

Wilma Golstein: "THE RECOVERY PROCESS FROM THAT SHOWS A LOT MORE ABOUT A PERSON USUALLY AT THAT POINT, THAN THE ACTUAL MISTAKE. I MEAN, WE ALL MAKE...EVERYBODY KNOWS YOU MAKE MISTAKES."

Close-up of Geraldine Ferraro (B-ROLL)

Geraldine Ferraro: "...THOSE STATEMENTS WERE TRUE IN 1978, AND THEY ARE TRUE TODAY."

Close-up of Wilma Golstein

Voice over Wilma Golstein: "WHEN GERALDINE FERRARRO HAD THAT NEWS CONFERENCE, WHEN SHE JUST CALLED THEM AND SAID, 'YOU KNOW, I WANT TO TALK ABOUT THESE ACCUSATIONS AND CHARGES.' SHE MET THEM HEAD-ON AND GOT A LOT OF CREDIT. IT DIDN'T LAST FOR A LONG TIME, OBVIOUSLY, BECAUSE SHE'S BEEN PLAGUED BY THINGS EVER SINCE, BUT SHE GOT A LOT OF POINTS FOR JUST STANDING UP

TO PEOPLE, ANSWERING QUESTIONS, AND THEN FINALLY SAYING: "I'VE ANSWERED THAT QUESTION ENOUGH. I'M NOT GOING TO ANSWER IT ANYMORE."

Shots of Jimmy Carter and Jesse Jackson walking and talking with the press (B-ROLL).

Narrator: YET, SOME MISTAKES LINGER AND HAVE NINE LIVES; AND THE MEDIA AND THE VOTING PUBLIC'S THIRST FOR REVEALING AND FOCUSING ON OTHER GAFFES MADE BY CANDIDATES DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE EASILY QUENCHED. WHAT PURPOSE DOES THIS FOCUS SERVE? SOME SAY IT'S THE NATURE OF THE PRESS.

Close-up of Richard Armstrong
Super: Richard Armstrong/ Author
The Next Hurrah

Richard Armstrong: "THE PRESS , IS SO INTERESTED IN FINDING THOSE DEVIATIONS, THOSE GAFFES. THEY'RE INTERESTED IN THE STRATEGY. THEY'RE INTERESTED IN THE HORSE RACE ASPECT, YOU KNOW, WHO'S AHEAD, WHO'S BEHIND. THEY'RE INTERESTED IN THE MECHANICS OF THE CAMPAIGN BECAUSE THESE ARE ALL THE THINGS THAT ARE DYNAMIC FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW. THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT CHANGE FROM DAY TO DAY."

Medium close-up of Robert Engel
Shots of press covering candidates (B-ROLL)

Robert Engel: "THE NATURE OF THE MEDIUM OF POLITICS, WHICH IS TELEVISION, HAS CHANGED. THE FOCUS OF CAMPAIGNS MORE TOWARDS THE INDIVIDUAL, THAN TOWARD THE ISSUES."

Medium close-up of Ron Nessen

Ron Nessen: "IT'S MUCH EASIER TO SPEND YOUR MINUTE ON TELEVISION SHOWING A GUY FALLING DOWN, THAN IT IS TO SPEND YOUR MINUTE ON TELEVISION ANALYZING WHY

WE'VE SUDDENLY DROPPED IN TO A RECESSION IN THE FALL OF 1974, WHICH WE DID, OR WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO ABOUT THE ENERGY PROBLEM. YOU KNOW, THOSE COMPLEX ISSUES."

Medium close-up of Joseph Powell

Joseph Powell: "JOURNALISTS, WHEN THEY ARE HONEST, YOU KNOW SOMETIMES WE ARE, WILL ADMIT THAT, ON THE WHOLE, JOURNALISTS FIND ISSUES BORING AND THEY ALSO BELIEVE, WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION, THAT THE AMERICAN VOTER FINDS ISSUES BORING."

Medium close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "I THINK IT IS TO SOME EXTENT THE SPECTER OF ENTERTAINMENT NEWS, IF YOU'RE IN A SITUATION...LETS SAY YOU'RE A SENIOR PRODUCER IN A NEWS NETWORK...NATIONAL NEWS. AND YOU HAVE GOT A CHOICE BETWEEN DOING A THREE MINUTE PIECE ON GEORGE BUSH'S EDUCATION PROGRAM OR A THREE MINUTE PIECE ON MICHAEL DUKAKIS SLIPPED ON A BANANA PEEL TODAY, AND TRIPPED DOWN THE STEPS OF HIS CAMPAIGN PLANE. YOU'RE GOING TO LOOK AT THE FOOTAGE AND YOU ARE GOING TO KNOW THAT RATINGS DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT YOUR PARENT COMPANY MAKES MONEY, WHICH IS WHETHER OR NOT YOU GET ADVANCED TO BE THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF THE NEWS, AND YOU'RE GOING TO GET THE

Shots of Michael Dukakis in army tank, a cameraman, a pro-Dukakis rally (B-ROLL)

BANANA PEEL STORY READY TO GO. BECAUSE NEWS IS STILL THE NEWS BUSINESS. THERE'S A SHOWBIZ ASPECT TO IT. IT'S TELEVISION. IT

WANTS GOOD FUNNY PICTURES,
AND GAFFES OFFER A GOOD
FUNNY PICTURE."

Medium close-up of Ron Nessen

Ron Nessen: "YOU KNOW FORD
WENT OUT TO DELIVER HIS MAJOR
AGRICULTURAL SPEECH AT IOWA
STATE UNIVERSITY; AND WHEN
HE BEGAN THE SPEECH, HE SAID:
"I'M REALLY GLAD TO BE HERE AT
OHIO STATE." AND THEN HE
CORRECTED HIMSELF. AND THAT
NIGHT ON TELEVISION, ALL THE
NETWORKS SHOWED THAT
TRIVIAL SLIP OF THE TONGUE,
INSTEAD OF EVEN A SINGLE
SENTENCE ABOUT HIS FARM
POLICY."

Medium close-up of Richard Armstrong

Narrator: BUT RICHARD
ARMSTRONG SEES THINGS A BIT
DIFFERENTLY. HE BELIEVES THAT
THE ADVENT OF TELEVISION AND
ITS IMPACT ON THE

Shots of John Kennedy (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: ABC News
Shots of a Republican Convention

PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION
PROCESS IS AN OLDSTORY; AND
WHAT IS NEW ABOUT POLITICAL
TELEVISION IN THE EIGHTIES IS
THAT IT IS CHEAPER, MORE
PLENTIFUL AND MORE
IMMEDIATE.

Medium close-up of Richard Armstrong

Richard Armstrong: "SATELLITES ARE
ENABLING SMALLER TV STATIONS
TO COVER PRESIDENTIAL
CAMPAIGNS. WHERE BY
THEMSELVES...WHERE IN THE
PAST THEY WOULD HAVE TO
DEPEND ON A NETWORK FEED.
NOWADAYS, WITH SATELLITES,
WITH MINI-CAMS, WITH THE
ABILITY TO HAVE A MOBILE UP-
LINK TRUCK IN ORDER TO FILM
SOMETHING ON THE SPOT AND
SEND IT UP TO THE SATELLITE

Shots of small station crews covering candidates (B-ROLL)

Shots of press hounding candidates (B-ROLL)

Close-up of Jonathan Alter

Shots of a production crew setting up with Ronald Reagan at a supermarket filming TV commercial (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: CBS News

AND SEND IT BACK TO YOUR LOCAL TELEVISION STATION IN A SMALL TOWN LIKE SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, OR OMETHING LIKE THAT, SENABLES THEM TO SEND REPORTERS ON THE BUS WITH THE CANDIDATE. ENABLES THEM TO SEND REPORTERS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. THE UP-SHOT IS, INDEED, THAT YOU HAVE GOT A LOT MORE REPORTERS IN THIS GAME. AND I THINK, PROBABLY, THAT DOES HAVE AN EFFECT ON THEM ALL CHASING THESE LITTLE STORIES."

Jonathan Alter: "IT'S VERY HARD TO GET A SCOOP IN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS. YOU ESSENTIALLY HAVE TOO MANY REPORTERS CHASING TOO FEW STORIES WITH TOO LITTLE TIME AND SPACE TO REALLY EXPLORE THEM IN ANY PROPER CONTEXT."

Narrator: SOME SAY THIS FOCUS ON CANDIDATES' FLAWS AND MISTAKES IS AN ATTEMPT TO BATTLE THE PROFESSIONAL IMAGE MAKERS. A CRUCIAL MAINSTAY IN MODERN POLITICS.

Crewman: "THREE, TWO, ONE...AND CUE, PLEASE." Ronald Reagan: "I'VE BEEN CAMPAIGNING TODAY IN WESTERN OHIO, AND I'M SPEAKING TO YOU NOW FROM LIMA, A COMMUNITY OF ABOUT 50-THOUSAND PEOPLE."

Crewman: "CUT, PLEASE." Ronald Reagan: "WHAT?"

Crewman: "60-THOUSAND INSTEAD OF 50-THOUSAND, GOVERNOR...THE POPULATION OF LIMA."

Slate: "The Packaging of George Bush" (TV commercial). Shots of 5-6 men sitting around a table (B-ROLL)

Still pictures of George Bush, Jesse Jackson, and Bob Dole

Medium close-up of Joseph Powell

Shots of newspaper headlines

Medium close-up of Michael Murphy

Ronald Reagan: "OH, THE SCRIPT I SAW ORIGINALLY SAID FIFTY. I..."
Crewman: "SIXTY. IT'S RIGHT ON THE PROMPTER, SIR."

Man #1: "THE COMMERCIAL IS GOING TO MAKE BUSH LOOK LIKE A STRONG, EXPERIENCED LEADER."

Man #2: "Okay."

Man #3: "YEAH."

Man #4: "I CAN SEE IT NOW. HEAD OF THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON DRUGS...DRUG TRAFFIC GOES UP 400%"

Man #5: "AND GENERAL NORIEGA WAS ON THE PAYROLL."

Man #1: "HMM...VERY AMUSING."

Man #4: "BUSH WAS HEAD OF THE TASK FORCE ON TERRORISM TOO, WHILE THEY MADE DEALS TO SEND MISSILES TO THE AYATOLLAH."

Man #5: "GEORGE BUSH. STRONG, EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP."

Voice over Joseph Powell: "DESPITE ALL IT'S BEEN SAID ABOUT CANDIDATES SORT OF CREATING THEMSELVES FROM WHOLE CLOTH. GENERALLY SPEAKING, IT'S QUITE DIFFICULT FOR A PERSON SEEKING THE PRESIDENCY, WHO IN ALMOST EVERY CASE IS WELL INTO THE MIDDLE YEARS OF LIFE, TO RECREATE ONESELF. YOU JUST CAN'T DO THAT."

Narrator: AND THE PROFESSIONAL IMAGE MAKERS DENY THEIR POWER TO DECEIVE.

Michael Murphy: "ONE OF THE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT OUR BUSINESS IS THAT WE COME WITH SPECIAL LENSES AND SPECIAL

MAKE UP AND TRICKS SO WE CHANGE PEOPLE. WHEN IN REALITY WHAT WE DO IS AMPLIFY PEOPLE. WE TRY TO FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS, THINGS THAT WE KNOW THAT APPEAL ABOUT THEM, AND TRY TO CONTROL THE ELECTION DIALOGUE, SO THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CANDIDATE THAT ARE ATTRACTIVE, ARE WHAT PEOPLE FOCUS ON THEN. WE AMPLIFY THINGS. WE POLISH THEM. WE DON'T CHANGE A WHOLE LOT BECAUSE YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH THAT."

Medium close-up of Robert Engel

Robert Engel: "IMAGE IN POLITICS FOR CANDIDATES OR FOR POLITICAL CONSULTANTS THAT TRY TO CONSTRUCT IMAGES FOR PEOPLE THAT AREN'T REAL, WHAT HAPPENS IS THEY BECOME FALSE IN FRONT OF THE PUBLIC."

Shots of M. Dukakis playing baseball, a crowd cheering, George Bush with his fitness guru (B-ROLL)

Narrator: AND OTHERS CONTEST THE IDEA THAT IMAGE MAKING IS NEW.

Medium close up of Richard Armstrong

Richard Armstrong: "THIS WHOLE CONCEPT OF IMAGE IS NOTHING NEW EITHER. I MEAN, IT GOES BACK HUNDREDS OF YEARS. LOOK AT LINCOLN, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO RAN IN 19...I MEAN 1860 AS A MAN RIGHT OUT OF THE FRONTIER. OLD ABE, THE LOG SPLITTER. HE JUST KIND OF, SORT OF WALKED OUT OF THE WOODS AND RIGHT INTO THE WHITE HOUSE, YOU KNOW. THAT'S THE WAY HE WAS PORTRAYED TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. BUT HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL LAWYER. HE WAS A SUCCESSFUL ONE. HE HAD RUN FOR OFFICE MANY TIMES. HE HADN'T WON THAT OFTEN, BUT

Still shot of a 1841 Almanac with
William Henry Harrison on its cover

HE HAD RUN FOR OFFICE MANY TIMES. HE WAS NOT SOME GUY WHO HAD JUST FINISHED SPLITTING LOGS AND DECIDED TO RUN FOR THE WHITE HOUSE, THAT WAS AN IMAGE-BASED CAMPAIGN. THE EFFECT OF TELEVISION, INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, IS THAT WE CAN'T GET AWAY WITH STUFF THE WAY WE USED TO. YOU COULDN'T PUT TOGETHER A CAMPAIGN LIKE LINCOLN'S OR WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON'S NOWADAYS. YOU COULDN'T CREATE AN IMAGE THAT WAS FUNDAMENTALLY FALSE IN THAT WAY OR PEOPLE WOULD CATCH IT TOO EASILY. THE MEDIA WOULD CATCH IT. AND IT'S TOO DIFFICULT WITH THIS POWER OF TELEVISION..."

Still shots of a newspaper headlines

Narrator: OUR FOCUS ON GAFFES, MISTAKES AND BLUNDERS, AND OUR APPARENT ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOSE WHICH ARE FATAL AND THOSE WHICH ARE EXCUSABLY HUMAN, MAY REFLECT INSTEAD A LEGITIMATE PROCESS OF TESTING THE CHARACTER AND ABILITY OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES."

Medium close-up of Jonathan Alter

Jonathan Alter: "I THINK IT ALSO REFLECTS EXPERIENCE WITH PREVIOUS PRESIDENTS WHERE REPORTERS START TO SAY TO THEMSELVES: "WHY SHOULD WE, AND OUR READERS AND VIEWERS, FIND OUT ABOUT THIS GUY'S CHARACTER FLAWS AFTER HE'S PRESIDENT? WHY NOT TRY TO FIND ABOUT THEM BEFORE HE'S PRESIDENT?" HAVING BEEN THROUGH NIXON, JOHNSON, AND EVEN SOME OF THE LESSER KIND OF CHARACTERS FLAWS, BUT NONE

THE LESS, IMPORTANT POLITICALLY OF JIMMY CARTER. IT WAS A SENSE IN REAGAN ON ANOTHER LEVEL. IT WAS A SENSE THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO FIND OUT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE BEFORE HE GUY BECOMES PRESIDENT."

Medium close-up of Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy: "THE TV MEDIA WANTS TO TEST THE CHARACTER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THEY WANT TO PUT HIM ON A GRILL. LET THEM SIZZLE, TO SEE IF THEY POP. IT'S THAT SIMPLE. IT'S PART OF THE RITUAL WHEN IT GOES DOWN TO BECOMING PRESIDENT."

Medium close-up of Jonathan Alter

Jonathan Alter: "HOW DOES A GAFFE BUILD OVER A FEW WEEKS, OR MONTHS OR YEARS? IN THAT CASE, IT REALLY HAS TO CUT TO A CHARACTER ISSUE. SO, IN THE CASE OF TED KENNEDY, PEOPLE THOUGHT THE CHAPPAQUIDDICK RACE A CHARACTER ISSUE. IT WASN'T A TEMPORARY CONSIDERATION. TEMPORARY SLIP OF THE TONGUE."

Medium close-up of Geraldine Ferraro

Geraldine Ferraro: "BUT I HONESTLY...I MEAN, SOMETHING LIKE THIS DISCUSSION OF PRESIDENT FORD NOT REALIZING THAT POLAND WAS A COMMUNIST STATE, OR GEORGE BUSH TOASTING MARCOS AS A GREAT DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY...I THINK THOSE ARE GAFFES THAT HAVE MUCH BROADER IMPLICATIONS."

Narrator: THIS FOCUS ON GAFFES AND MISTAKES MAY VERY WELL SERVE AS A LEGITIMATE TEST OF CANDIDATES' CHARACTER AND ABILITY. STILL, FEW WOULD ARGUE THAT IT IS NOT WITHOUT POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE."

Close-up of Edward Muskie crying and handling of incident (B-ROLL)

"FOR THREE YEARS, I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT I HAVE NO EMOTIONS. I WAS TO COOL. SO, ON THE ONE OCCASION I SHOW EMOTION ABOUT THE ATTACK UPON MY WIFE. YOU KNOW, IF I CAN'T SHOW EMOTION IN THAT INSTANCE THEN I GUESS THE CONCLUSION IS THAT I GOTTA BE AN ICEBERG ALL OF THE TIME. AND I DON'T REALLY THINK THAT PEOPLE WANT AN ICEBERG AS THEIR PRESIDENT."

Close-up of George Bush (B-ROLL)
Courtesy super: CBS News

Dan Rather: "VICE-PRESIDENT THIS QUES..."

George Bush: "...WHOLE CAREER. IT'S NOT FAIR TO JUDGE MY WHOLE CAREER BY A REHASH ON IRAN. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF I JUDGED YOUR CAREER BY THOSE SEVEN MINUTES WHEN YOU WALKED OFF THE SET IN NEW YORK? WOULD YOU LIKE THAT?"

Close-up of Dan Rather (B-ROLL)

Medium close-up of Dan Rather (B-ROLL)

Dan Rather: "INTERVIEWS SUCH AS THE ONE LAST EVENING ARE IN SOME WAYS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE QUESTIONER, FOR THE SUBJECT, AND FOR SOME VIEWERS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT AND ONLY HOPE, FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, THAT IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR DEMOCRATIC PROCESS FOR CHOOSING OUR PRESIDENT."

Medium close-up of Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson: "SOMETIMES THE MEDIA IS NOT A WATCHDOG, IT'S A BULLDOG. SOMETIMES IT BITES PEOPLE. SOMETIMES IT'S A HOUND DOG. IT CHASES PEOPLE. AND SOMETIMES DOES SO WITH BLINDERS ON IT'S EYES."

Medium close-up of Geraldine Ferraro

Geraldine Ferraro: "I THINK THE PRESS HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC, NOT TO CENSOR NEWS, (GOD, NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT), BUT TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF WHAT THEY ARE DOING. GUYS THAT LOOK AT THEMSELVES AND SAY, "WHAT AM I REPORTING THIS STORY FOR? AM I REPORTING IT FOR THE LEGITIMATE PURPOSE OF LETTING THE PUBLIC KNOW. SO THEY HAVE THE...THEY CAN SIT THERE AND FIGURE OUT WHETHER THIS IS IMPORTANT TO THEM WHEN THEY GO TO VOTE. AND WHETHER OR NOT THIS IS SOMETHING THEY CARE ABOUT."

Medium close-up of Pat Robinson
(B-ROLL)

Pat Robertson: "AND I THINK, FRANKLY, IT'S OUTRAGEOUS TO INTRUDE INTO A MAN'S FAMILY AND TO TRY TO DO DAMAGE TO A MAN'S WIFE AND CHILDREN UNDER THE GUISE OF JOURNALISM. IF SOMEBODY IS CARRYING ON AN AFFAIR TODAY AND IT'S DOING IT ON A REPEAT BASIS, THEN THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE."

Close-up of Jonathan Alter

Jonathan Alter: "I THINK THAT THERE SHOULD BE WHAT YOU COULD CALL A STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON CHARACTER QUESTIONS. IF SOMEBODY DID SOMETHING NOT THAT SERIOUS SEVERAL YEARS AGO, IT'S NOT MUCH OF AN ISSUE AS IF THEY'RE DOING IT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CAMPAIGN. WHEN THEY KNOW THAT THEY SHOULDN'T BE DOING THIS. AND IT TELLS YOU SOMETHING ABOUT THE KIND OF RISKS THEY ARE WILLING TO TAKE. THE LEVEL OF DECEPTION

THAT THEY ARE WILLING TO ENGAGE IN. AND IT BECOMES A DIFFERENT KIND OF ISSUE THAN IF IT HAD HAPPENED SEVERAL YEARS AGO."

Shots of voters at the poll (B-ROLL)

Narrator: PERHAPS, THOUGH, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING BALANCE AND FAIRNESS IS THIS PROCESS OF CHARACTER AND IMAGE TESTING RESTS WITH THE PEOPLE, WITH THE VOTING PUBLIC.

Medium close-up of Robert Engel

Robert Engel: "THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE IMAGE OR CHARACTER TEST IN THE PROCESS IS THE FACT THAT PEOPLE WILL ONLY LOOK AT IMAGE AND CHARACTER. THAT WE'LL GET SO CAUGHT-UP IN NOT LOOKING AT SOMEONE'S CAREER LONG TERM AND LOOKING AT THEIR PROPOSALS. THE THINGS THAT THEY WANT TO DO. WHERE THEY WANT TO TAKE THE COUNTRY. THAT WE'LL JUST START TO FOCUS ON ONE OR TWO SPECIFIC THINGS. WE'VE GOT TO JUDGE INDIVIDUALS, AS WELL AS POLITICIANS, ON THE WHOLE."

Medium close-up of Ron Nessen

Ron Nessen: "IF A CAMPAIGN IS DOMINATED, OR THE COVERAGE OF A CAMPAIGN IS DOMINATED BY GAFFES, AND SLIP-OFFS AND SO FORTH, THEY'RE MISLEADING. BECAUSE THAT IS CERTAINLY NOT WHAT THESE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT. NOW MAYBE THIS CANDIDATE IS THE WRONG PERSON TO BE PRESIDENT, BUT THE REASON...I MEAN THE PUBLIC SHOULD NOT GET THE IDEA THAT THE REASON HE IS THE WRONG PERSON TO BE PRESIDENT IS BECAUSE HE SAID HE WAS AT OHIO STATE WHEN HE

WAS REALLY AT IOWA STATE. OR BECAUSE HE FELL DOWN WHILE SKIING IN VAIL. I MEAN, LETS FIND OUT WHAT HIS POLICIES ARE. WHAT HE STANDS FOR. WHAT HE WOULD DO IN OFFICE. AND IF WE DON'T LIKE THAT, THEN VOTE AGAINST THE GUY."

Medium close-up of Joseph Powell

Joseph Powell: "DESPITE ALL WE SAY AS AMERICANS ABOUT HOW WE WANT MORE INFORMATION. WE WANT THERE TO BE MORE SUBSTANCE. WE WANT THEM TO BE MORE SPECIFIC. WHEN THEY START DOING THAT OUR EYES START TO GLAZE OVER. WE SWITCH THE CHANNEL. WE TURN...WE FLIP THE PAGE AND GO TO ANOTHER STORY."

Medium close-up of Geraldine Ferrarro

Geraldine Ferrarro: "THE AMERICAN PUBLIC DOESN'T WANT TO SPEND TIME LISTENING TO IT. THEY WOULD RATHER WATCH A COMEDY SHOW THAT GETS THEIR MINDS OFF THEIR OWN PROBLEMS, THAN WORRYING ABOUT WHAT SIX PEOPLE ARE DEBATING ABOUT, AND PROBLEMS AND ISSUES THAT NOBODY CAN SOLVE OR AT LEAST THEY CAN'T SOLVE IN THEIR LIVING ROOM. I DON'T KNOW WHOSE FAULT IT IS."

Medium close-up of Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson: "THE PUBLIC NEED NOT BE THAT CYNICAL, AFTER ALL CANDIDATES ARE EXTENTIONS OF THE PEOPLE. CANDIDATES ARE MUCH LIKE PEOPLE, AND ALL OF US ERROR. ALL OF US HAVE FAULTS, AND TO THAT EXTENT THE CANDIDATE HAS NO MORE PERFECTION, THAN THE PUBLIC IS. SO, THERE MUST

BE SOME REASONABLE LATITUDE FOR THE HUMAN FACTOR AS WE JUDGE CANDIDATES, AND AS THE CANDIDATES JUDGE THE PEOPLE. FOR EXAMPLE, IF A GROUP OF YOUTHS...IF I WENT TO A COLLEGE OR SOMETHING, AND THERE BE A THOUSAND. I ASK THEM BIG QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE, I SAID ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE. NO?, BY WHAT AUTHORITY DO YOU SPEAK. I MEAN, YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND YOU'RE DOING LESS THAN YOUR BEST. YOU'RE GOING TO DEMAND OF ME PERFECTION, AND YOU DO LESS THAN YOUR BEST. AND I'M AT THAT DEMONSTRATION RISKING MY LIFE FOR YOU TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE. YOU HAVE SURRENDERED TO CYNICISM. YOU HAVE DROPPED OUT OF THE PROCESS. AND SO, I DON'T MIND BEING CHALLENGED, BUT I WILL CHALLENGE."

Shots of people at national conventions
 Super title: "Fatal Detractions: The Role of
 Gaffes in Presidential Elections"
 (B-ROLL)

Music full

Credits

Same music full

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Overview

The primary objective and issue to be addressed is summarized in the attached statement of *Importance of Issue*. At the most basic level, the program's primary objective is to examine the role of gaffes in presidential campaigns. The structure of framework for the program is based on a theoretical construct provided by Lance Bennett. Bennett provides a powerful argument for "taking gaffes seriously as central objects of electoral discourse." Bennett contends that when gaffes are viewed this way and taken seriously, they can be "shown to be the basis of clearly identifiable degradation rituals in campaigns."

In simple terms, Bennett holds that campaigns serve as a stress test and that one of the measures of performance in this test is the incidence and handling of gaffes. The media and voting public evaluate candidates on those occasions when they blunder, make mistakes, lose control or reveal flaws in their carefully staged performances or images. Bennett also argues that because so much attention is paid to these negative behaviors, they must provide some useful information.

The perspective that is developed in Bennett's article is the following. First, gaffes become campaign issues when they can be defined in terms of general norms about leadership and accountability. An evaluation about a gaffe sequence generates information about an incident which becomes the basis for practical judgment. The handling of gaffes or such incidents also generates meaningful information which is used to make practical judgments about the candidate.

Program Objectives

Cognitive:

- To clarify what criteria are being used by the voting public to evaluate candidates, and by doing this, to provide a better understanding of the purpose of presidential election campaigns.
- To demonstrate the media's role and impact on how we evaluate candidates.
- To convince the viewer that the focus on candidates personal attributes and gaffes reveals meaningful information which helps us assess how a candidate will potentially perform in office.

Affective

- To make the public feel more positive about our presidential selection process.
- To increase the public interest about this as well as other political issues.

Behavioral

- To encourage the intention to vote.
- To inspire the public to participate in local and/or national politics.
- To encourage the intention to discuss political issues.

Evaluation Guidelines and Criteria

In evaluating the program, it is important to understand that there were some time, access and budgetary constraints imposed upon us because of the program's subject matter. First, many of the targeted participants were individuals of national prominence and thus access to them was an issue. In addition, because of the timeliness of the information, our goal was to complete the production before the '88 campaign. And finally, as with most student productions, we had a limited program budget.

With this in mind, the program should be evaluated in terms of the following:

1. How well it achieved the objectives stated above.
2. The effectiveness of the program content and message.
3. How appropriate and well the medium was used to deliver the message.

PROGRAM CONTENT AND MESSAGE

[illegible]

COMMERCIAL APPEAL OF PROGRAM

The program was entertaining:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Indifferent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Disagree

The program held my attention:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No
If yes, what factors contributed to this?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pacing of program
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organization of material
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individuals interviewed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Archival video
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject matter

The program was visually pleasing:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Indifferent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Disagree

The archival video was used effectively:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Indifferent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Disagree

The program had a professional appearance:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Indifferent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Disagree

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