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A COMMUNICATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF  
TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE 1968  
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL  
CONVENTION

THESIS

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By

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This study investigates how television coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention largely determined the negative public impression of the convention and its candidate. The coverage had a definite effect on the workings of the convention through the images and information it conveyed to the delegates. The coverage also shaped the broadcast picture of the event by linking the convention to the violence in the streets..

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will be concerned with the events of the 1968 Democratic National Convention and the television coverage of those events. 1968 was an unusual and eventful political year. It was a year of conflicts, concessions, and multiple and diverse candidates. It was a year when the issue of Vietnam divided the Democratic Party and caused the decision by an incumbent President, Lyndon Johnson, not to seek re-nomination and continuance in office.

The events of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968 present an interesting picture of television journalism. The TV people took a hand in shaping both the convention itself, and public response to its events.

The closeness of the Presidential race in 1968 thrust this influence into the limelight. It was here, as in no other election, that television may have determined the next President; not by the way he presented himself and conveyed his own image, but by events that Senator Humphrey neither fully understood nor was able to control.

Those events were so striking and memorable, when shown on television, that the role of television coverage in portraying them became an obvious consideration. Questions

concerning the influence of the television coverage of the convention were obvious ones to be asked because of the dramatic nature of the coverage that the TV networks broadcast:

What part did television play in that choice (of a President)? The question--especially the effects of the televising of the riotous Democratic convention--will be debated for years. . . . Whatever the influence of television on the 1968 election, it will be said that it is hard to pinpoint and long in the making. It involves events preceding the campaign and is intertwined with a myriad of political factors that help to shape the images of candidates and parties and to define the issues of the campaign. Television is obviously only one among many news media . . . still, more and more, the events "seen" on television turn out to be most significant politically.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the focus of this paper is to determine the role of television coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. It attempts to isolate the influence that television had on the internal workings of the convention, and it tries to determine the impact that TV coverage had for the viewing audience.

Since the advent of the mass media there have been numerous studies by a wide variety of scholars to isolate those effects that are attributable to the mass media. The general results have been to suggest that the effects of mass communications on political voting decisions are minimal. The research has often indicated that mass media effects occur among other mediating factors and that specific changes in attitudes or behavior that can be linked directly to the mass media are the exception rather than the rule. A fairly

complete summary of these early studies is available in Joseph Klapper's The Effects of Mass Communication.

Other studies, especially a group of studies by Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, have indicated that television has more of an impact than was previously assumed. These studies suggest that television generally has its effect over the long term because of its ability to define the issues:

In other words, we feel that the mass media structure issues and personalities. They do this over a period of time, and thus this impact seems less spectacular than the shift or crystallization of a particular vote decision. We cannot help but believe that, indirectly, by creating a political climate, a sense of urgency, an image of parties and candidates, etc., they do influence votes.<sup>2</sup>

The 1968 Democratic National Convention occurred under unusual circumstances. One of the party's leading contenders and most charismatic leaders, Robert Kennedy, had been assassinated while running for the nomination. There was violence in the streets of the convention city and uncertainty in the convention hall. All of these events seem to the author to heighten the possibility for television coverage to have a direct impact.

There are no available studies which isolate the specific effect of the coverage on voting decisions in 1968, and at this late date, an attempt to do such a study seems unlikely to succeed. Enough time has passed so that the data gained from such a study would depend upon questionable recollections. In addition, the political images of the

candidates in the 1968 election have been affected so drastically by the events since then, that the data gained from such a study seems questionable, at best.

It does, however, seem both possible and beneficial to study the role that television played in shaping the convention and its own broadcasting picture of the events. If television can influence votes by "creating a political climate, a sense of urgency, and an image of parties and candidates," then 1968 seemed to be a year in which those influences would be greater than normal. There were enough emotional issues, changing fortunes, and fluctuating images in 1968 to make the information that television provided about the convention especially important to the viewers in the formation of political judgments. The events of the 1968 convention can be compared with the broadcast picture of the event to see if television altered candidates' images and issues in the campaign. Such an analysis can lead to a greater understanding not only of the role that television played in the 1968 campaign, but also its function in the political process.

There have been a variety of studies done by others relating to various aspects of the 1968 Democratic Convention and to the general nature of television coverage of political conventions, including "Television and the Democratic National Convention of 1968," by William R. Brown, which provides a brief overview of the coverage and some of its implications; "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial

Process, Chicago," by Thomas Whiteside, which describes the editorial process of selection as it occurred during the 1968 Democratic convention; "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic National Convention," by Robert I. Norvold, a rhetorical analysis of Humphrey's televised convention speech; "Amateurs and Professionals: A Study of Delegates to the 1968 Democratic Convention," by John W. Soule and James W. Clarke, an analysis of the delegate structure in Chicago; general studies such as "Television and Political Campaigns," by Emory S. Bogardus, an early analysis of television's role in political conventions, "The Effect of Television on Political Campaigns," by Don Hahn, which treats the overall function of TV in political campaigns; studies and narratives of the events in Chicago such as Rights in Conflict, The Walker Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.<sup>3</sup>

This paper supplements these in that it will focus on some specific aspects of television's role in the 1968 Democratic Convention. It is concerned with the influences caused by the nature of TV coverage; it is only incidentally concerned with the on-air analyses and judgments made by television commentators. It is concerned with changes that are due to the fact rather than the substance of television. Secondly, this paper is concerned with both the internal and external effects on the convention, with TV's effects on both the functioning of the convention and television's role in



shaping the image it transmits. Finally, the other studies of television and the 1968 Convention are both brief and general. This paper attempts to isolate specific incidents with a specific impact.

The paper that follows is divided into four basic segments. Each will consider one aspect of television's role in the 1968 Democratic convention. Chapter two provides a background for the reader of the events leading up to the convention and the happenings once the convention began. Chapter three discusses the role that television plays in altering a political convention and some specific effects on the 1968 convention. Chapter four considers the manner in which the television medium was able to alter or shape the television picture of the convention that the audience received. The final chapter draws some conclusions about the role of television coverage in 1968 and about its possible effects on the Humphrey candidacy.

This study will rely on observations about the happenings in Chicago from a variety of sources. Coverage of convention week in newspapers such as The New York Times and The Dallas Morning News has been studied as well as magazines such as Time and Newsweek. In addition, political narratives such as White's The Making of the President 1968 and Chester's An American Melodrama have been consulted. These provide a good view of what happened during the convention, and a wide variety of studies such as those mentioned earlier aid the author in analyzing these events.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, Politics and Television (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Lang, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>William R. Brown, "Television and the Democratic National Convention of 1968," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55, No. 3 (October, 1969), 327; Thomas Whiteside, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial Process, Chicago," Columbia Journalism Review, 4 (Winter, 1968), 52; Robert I. Nordvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic National Convention," Today's Speech, 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1970), 37; John W. Soule and James W. Clarke, "Amateurs and Professionals: A Study of Delegates to the 1968 Democratic National Convention," American Political Science Review, 64 (Annual, 1970), 888; Emory S. Bogardus, "Television and Political Campaigns," Sociology and Social Research, 37 (November-December, 1952), 116; Don Hahn, "The Effect of Television on Political Campaigns," Today's Speech, 18, No. 2 (Spring, 1970), 7; The Walker Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Rights in Conflict (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 16.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND AND EVENTS

The role of television coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention cannot be understood without considering the montage of events and personalities that surrounded it. No political convention occurs in isolation; the political events and climate shape it, and the men in control of the party and the ones working for power all leave their mark.

That the convention was involved with the events occurring simultaneously is especially true of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. In 1968, the Democrats were not just choosing a Presidential candidate. The anti-war protests and demonstrations were reaching a peak. The entire country was involved in an issue whose volatility aroused passion and concern.

The center of that concern was the administration of Lyndon Johnson and its policies. The Democrats came not only to select a candidate, but to affirm or reject a policy to which they were tied. The platform committee was to hear arguments for and select a plank concerning the War in Vietnam. The shape of that plank and the nomination of a candidate to support it was what this convention was about. There were, of course, other things to be decided and other planks

to be written. But it was on the War in Vietnam that the drama of the convention hinged.

In an effort to make themselves heard, those who were strongly opposed to the war came to Chicago. They could not be a part of the convention, nor could they vote for their choice of men and policies. What the opponents of the war could do was to use the staggering number of newsmen, broadcasters, and photographers to make their concerns visible to the whole country. While the Democrats were having their say in the convention hall, those who came to protest were communicating the way they knew best, in the streets.

That week, at the end of August, 1968, became an "event". The whole complex of events and personalities has often been referred to by the single name, "Chicago". A place became an event, much the same as Waterloo or Munich.

The communications media brought this about. The newspapers and the television networks brought what happened to the American public. The media visualized both the complexities of the political process and the conflicts in the streets. What the public actually "saw" of Chicago was what television showed them, amplified by what was presented in the other media.

This section will consider the background to these events and the events themselves. There is a long political process that leads up to a nominating convention. In 1968, this process was marked by events that were both very

important and unexpected. The events not only set the stage for the convention, but aroused some of the passions that became so evident during that week in August.

The pre-convention campaign brought the Democrats to Chicago. It was here that the setting became important. Through a combination of unusual circumstances and strong political personalities, the setting was to impose its own constraints on the actions of the participants and the way they could be covered. A telephone strike, the philosophy and orders of Mayor Daley, preparations by both the demonstrators and the police and national guard, and other conditions all combined to produce the events and the broadcasting that was seen throughout the world.

This chapter will discuss the political events leading up to the convention, the situation in Chicago as the convention was about to be held, and a brief chronological presentation of the events that occurred both in the Amphitheatre and on the streets. These discussions will present the situations into which the television networks brought their coverage and the events which were broadcast, so that the role that television played can be examined.

### The Political Situation

For the Democratic party, 1968 was one of the most unusual and tumultuous political years in its history. The Democrats had a President in office, normally a position of strength. But for Lyndon Baines Johnson, his position was

not a strong one. After his victory over Goldwater in 1964, and the mandate derived from it, Johnson enjoyed wide popularity. But the war in Vietnam changed that.

The war in Vietnam was certainly the most significant political event of the 1960's. Early in the effort there was general support among the American people for the continuation of American presence in South Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> As time went on, that support began to erode as our presence failed to force an end to the conflict.

Probably the most significant incident in the decline of American support occurred in early 1968. The North Vietnamese offensive to mark the Tet festival of the new year became the symbol of American ineffectiveness. The Tet offensive was perhaps a turning point. It showed the American people that the war was real and important:

The news made only modest headlines the next morning. . . . The second morning, however, no blur could conceal the dimensions of what was happening . . . These were not isolated raids: somehow the enemy had astounded the World and America with a force, a fury, and a battlefield presence that gave lie to all that Americans had been told for months . . . For Americans, a time of rethinking had begun. Had the government deceived its people? Or had the government deceived itself? And, in either case, whom could one trust? Trust was to be one of the major themes of the campaign of 1968 . . . it was a time of reassessment of American purpose and their own postures.<sup>2</sup>

As the Tet offensive was to change the opinions of many Americans, so it was to change the campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy. A number of supposedly secret polls<sup>3</sup> had reported

McCarthy's probable vote in the New Hampshire primary as low as 8 per cent, none had McCarthy higher than 11 per cent.

McCarthy's base of support was the university campus. The universities provided McCarthy not only a base of support, but a seemingly endless supply of campaign workers. The students left the universities by the thousands to work for McCarthy, first in New Hampshire. The combination of all this youthful effort and the war in Vietnam caused public opinion to begin shifting. By the time the primary election occurred it was clear that McCarthy would do better than anyone had expected. The results were staggering:

By 11:40 on the evening of March 12th it was obvious that Eugene McCarthy would do far better than the Gallup polls had predicted in January (12%); better than Johnson's private poll had told him in February (18%); better than Governor King had predicted in the first week in March (25 to 28%). The vote was coming in strong with McCarthy running slightly over 40% and Johnson, a sitting President, in a closed Democratic primary, was running under 50%.<sup>4</sup>

The sudden success of Eugene McCarthy in New Hampshire was to make itself felt on other Democratic political figures. The morning after the New Hampshire primary brought the announcement by Robert Kennedy that he was "reassessing" his possibilities of entering the 1968 Presidential race.

In the next few weeks, as it became likely that McCarthy would defeat President Johnson in the Wisconsin primary and that Robert Kennedy would enter the race for the Democratic nomination, Lyndon Johnson on March 31, made the

decision that was to change the face of the Democratic party in 1968:

I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.<sup>5</sup>

With Johnson out of the picture, a new name arose for consideration as a potential Democratic nominee. Hubert Horatio Humphrey began, tentatively, at first, to collect the support of the old-line party politicians. While McCarthy and Kennedy began to contest the primary elections in earnest, Humphrey began to marshall the support of those in the party who supported Lyndon Johnson and his policies. These were the keys to his chances of gaining the nomination. Humphrey was tied to the policies of Johnson both in the public mind, because of his service as Vice President, and as a political necessity, because it was from his support of these policies that he garnered the support of the party "regulars".

While Humphrey gained political support and convention delegates, Kennedy and McCarthy swept the primaries. McCarthy won in Wisconsin and Oregon. Kennedy won in Indiana and Nebraska. The most important of the primaries was to come in California. It had a large number of delegates to the national convention and it would serve as a judge of vote-getting potential to the convention delegates from other states.



Both McCarthy and Kennedy campaigned hard for the California victory. Kennedy held the edge from the beginning and he was able to hold it all the way until the election. The eventual outcome was an easy win for Kennedy.

After the run of primaries and the quiet efforts of Hubert Humphrey, it appeared that the nomination would be a three-way fight between Humphrey, McCarthy and Kennedy at the convention, with either Humphrey or Kennedy being the likely winner.

But again, something unexpected was to change the shape of Democratic politics for 1968. After the victory speech, Robert Kennedy prepared to leave California on June 5 to continue the effort for the nomination. As he left, he fell victim to the bullets of Sirhan Sirhan, and the second of the Kennedys was removed from politics by assassination.

Following the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the Democrats prepared to attend the National Convention with the party in turmoil. Humphrey had assumed the role of a clear favorite for the nomination on the first ballot. But this role did not come without bitterness and divisiveness. Neither the McCarthy supporters nor a lot of Kennedy's backers could accept Humphrey without a complete renunciation of the Vietnam policies of Lyndon Johnson, and Humphrey could not renounce Johnson without alienating the people who could give him the Democratic nomination. The impending floor fights over credentials and the Vietnam platform plank

suggested a convention that would be divisive enough to create severe problems for the Democratic party, even under the best of conditions.

But the Democratic convention was not to occur under the best of conditions. The anti-war protestors were preparing to come to Chicago where Mayor Daley was ready to take the hard line on "law and order". It was as if the protests in the streets were to underscore the divisions and internal problems of the Democratic party.

#### Convention Week

The 1968 Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago because of two men. Lyndon Johnson chose to have the convention in Chicago, and he chose the site at least partially because of Mayor Richard Daley. According to White:

But the decision (about the convention site) was Lyndon Johnson's alone. Lyndon Johnson had learned a President's prerogative in staging conventions of this party in 1964. Flying back from the Atlantic City Convention of that year with National Chairman John Bailey, he had grumbled about the choice. Who, demanded the President of Bailey, had chosen Atlantic City? Bailey excused himself--it was President Kennedy who had chosen the place. Thus Johnson took it on himself to decide the place of the next convention. Johnson chose Chicago for traditional reasons as well as new reasons . . . above all, because Johnson liked Daley, and Daley wanted it.<sup>6</sup>

Mayor Daley (and others like him) was important in the struggle for power in the Democratic party. Daley was not only the mayor of the nation's second largest city, he also controlled the state Democratic machinery as well. He was--

and is--a man candidates must reckon with when choosing a nominee. His power is reflected in this comment by Chester:

Lyndon Johnson personally advertised his esteem for the Mayor (Daley) by informing the White House switchboard that all calls from Daley were to be put through to him, personally and promptly. While discussing his chances of securing the nomination, Robert Kennedy had said, "Daley is the ball game."<sup>7</sup>

This situation was emphasized by CBS delegate analyst Martin Plissner when he said, "If Daley instructs the Illinois delegates to vote for Ho Chi Minh, all but twenty votes will go to Ho Chi Minh without a question."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, these two powerful men chose Chicago to be the site of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The communications media preferred to have it in Miami, the site of the Republican convention, so that they could save the enormous amounts of money they would spend in transferring the mass of men and equipment from Miami to Chicago. They exerted as much pressure as they could, without success. Even the site committee of the Democratic National Committee was overruled:

The Democratic National Committee had a subcommittee of ten people at work to recommend the most appropriate convention site, and they had presentations from the mayors of Miami Beach and Houston, as well as Chicago . . . after these presentations the subcommittee had voted on its preferences and that of the ten votes cast eight had been for choosing Miami Beach and two had been for Houston. Chicago got no votes . . . "I guess what it amounted to was that Lyndon Johnson and Richard Daley had ten votes between them on the committee."<sup>9</sup>

The choice of a convention site was to become important for a number of reasons, but for Mayor Daley, it meant that

he not only had substantial influence on the floor of the convention, but he controlled the police responsible for handling any demonstrations that might erupt. Daley's control of the police became important because there were people other than delegates who came to Chicago during the Democratic Convention. Protests against the war in Vietnam had been mounting since 1965. In October, 1967, anti-war activists under the collective banner of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam had rallied more than 50,000 people for a march on the Pentagon. It was the largest anti-war rally staged in Washington, D. C.

Some of the same activists were involved in a drive to produce an even bigger rally in Chicago. Such radical allies as David Dellinger, the creator of the National Mobilization and his two supporters Rennie Davis and Tom Hayden, along with Abbie Hoffman, the creator of the "Yippie" movement and black comedian Dick Gregory all tried to draw protestors to Chicago.

For a variety of reasons, probably the most important being Johnson's decision not to run, the organizers were not as successful as they hoped. The New York Times ran a story indicating that estimates of the turnout for Chicago would "range from a probably conservative 50,000 to a seemingly inflated 'over a million'."<sup>10</sup>

The eventual turnout was nowhere near the estimates provided by both the National Mobilization Committee and the Chicago Police Department. Some who came were hard-core

radicals bent upon confrontation, but most were simply people who were confused and angry at a situation over which they had no control. They had come not to overthrow, but to make themselves heard:

The basic revolutionary text of Hoffman and his friends, however, was not Karl Marx but Marshall McLuhan, and with the creation of YIPPIE, they developed a new revolutionary premise for the electronic era: when the might of a society cannot be challenged, strike at its myths.<sup>11</sup>

Their tactics included nominating, for consumption by the news media, a hundred-and-fifty pound pig called Pigasus for the Presidency in Chicago Civic Center. The "meeting" was broken up by the Chicago police who arrested not only six of the demonstrators, but also the recently nominated candidate.

There were thousands of demonstrators in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention, but the number and type of participants did not match what was expected by the authorities:

. . . the demonstrators who came to Chicago numbered at the outset no more than 2,000 and, even at the peak of activity, on nomination day, did not exceed 10,000. Of this number the vast majority were peacefully inclined, capable of having their frustrations eased by the sop of a march. Scarcely more than a few hundred could be classified as revolutionaries, and their weapons were the psychological ones of obscenity and irreverence.<sup>12</sup>

The police, meanwhile, had been preparing for a revolutionary army they expected to be at least 50,000 strong. They had prepared for, and perhaps fully expected the worst. The numbers and firepower of the police and National Guard

prepared them for a major battle, but not to face the largely unarmed and irreverent crowd with which they would come in contact.

Four days before the convention opened, Daley announced his attachment to the axiom, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Daley's "ounce" it was revealed, would put Chicago's 12,000-strong police force on twelve hour shifts, bring in 6,000 Illinois National Guardsmen, and have on tap 6,000 regular army troops complete with rifles, flame throwers, and bazookas. It was security in the paranoid style.<sup>13</sup>

Not only were the Chicago police overarmed for the group they would have to confront, but the atmosphere under which they worked and the orders they received clearly indicated that they were expected to take a tough, hard line. The policy for the confrontations that were to occur had been prepared in the preceding year:

The third factor emerged in the city's position regarding the riots following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and the April 27th peace march to the Civic Center in Chicago. The police were generally credited with restraint in handling the first riots - but Mayor Daley rebuked the Superintendent of Police. While it was later modified, his widely disseminated "shoot to kill arsonists and shoot to maim looters" order undoubtedly had an effect. The effect on police became apparent several weeks later, when they attacked demonstrators, bystanders, and media representatives at a Civic Center peace march. There were published criticisms - but the city's response was to ignore police violence.<sup>14</sup>

While the police had been preparing for the violent confrontation they expected to occur, the news media, especially television, were having their own problems preparing for the coming convention. The television networks had a tremendous

array of electronic equipment and technical talent to use in covering the Republican Convention in Miami. Their plans called for them to transfer this capability to Chicago to produce the kind of instantaneous coverage on which they were used to relying. CBS and NBC both planned to transfer their more than thirty camera crews each to Chicago. Backing up these crews was more than \$40 million worth of electronic equipment, linked by telephone land lines, to produce instantaneous communication and transmission.

The networks ran into a problem weeks before the convention when the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) called a strike against the Illinois Bell Telephone Company. The strike prevented the networks from installing the connecting lines and cable necessary to provide coverage at the downtown hotels and where the candidates were headquartered and where much of the action on the streets was to take place. The TV networks were faced with a major problem:

Their fantastic equipment for instant communication had been rendered half useless because the striking telephone workers of Chicago would permit no installation of lines except at the Convention Hall itself.<sup>15</sup>

Three days before the coverage of the convention was to begin, Walter Cronkite noted on his evening newscast that CBS coverage would be severely hampered "unless there were vast and unexpected changes in the next three days." The strike not only prevented linkup to the convention center, but the

Chicago police had also banned network use of mobile television trucks on the streets. Conkrite concluded, "Mayor Daley's agreement with the union to install equipment only at the convention hall left downtown hotels, with their important candidates headquarters, without adequate service for live television."<sup>16</sup>

The TV networks had developed great expertise in the broadcasting of live coverage of events such as this convention. Now, their expertise was blunted by the necessity for relying on old fashioned methods.

Giving up their hope of instantaneous visual transmission of action . . . , the television men fell back on old fashioned film in old fashioned cameras or cumbersome videotape. But to get such film and tape on the air, it would first be necessary to speed it by courier to the only two transmission centers available to each network--their downtown Chicago affiliates or . . . the broadcast facilities from Convention Hall.<sup>17</sup>

The television people were not only unhappy because of the IBEW strike, but also because of roadblocks thrown in their way by Mayor Daley and the city of Chicago. They had been unable to gain permission to use parking areas on the streets for their mobile units, the convention management had cut the number of passes they could use for access to the convention floor, and their ability to position cameras had been limited. They began to feel that the restrictions were more deliberate than coincidental. Whiteside observed:

I found the CBS people in Chicago expressing increasing dismay over what they felt was a deliberate policy on the part of the Daley administration



to hamper television coverage of any civil disorders, of any demonstrations taking place within the city against the Johnson administration and American involvement in Vietnam, of discussions taking place at delegation headquarters in the downtown hotels, and of the convention itself.<sup>18</sup>

The stage was set with uneasiness prevailing for what could only be a tumultuous convention. The events that followed were both expected and precipitated by the groups involved in them:

Thus the preparation of the set: security entirely in the hands of police and national guard, suspicious of all; Daley in control of the streets; and the television men, in control of the imagination of the nation, vexed and harrassed.<sup>19</sup>

The following is a brief, roughly chronological presentation of the events that occurred in Chicago immediately before and during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Any attempt to order so complex and fast-moving a period of time is difficult. It is even more so when externally placed restraints limit the available coverage. The following discussion owes much to the excellent Walker Report.<sup>20</sup> This report, done for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, utilized a study team of 90 full-time and 121 part-time interviewers and researchers. They analyzed almost 3,500 eyewitness accounts and over 12,000 still photographs to produce the best summary available of what happened.

It should be emphasized that the type of analysis used here is available only after the fact. The participants and

those affected by what went on had to operate with only the information available at the time. It was difficult for anyone involved to have full knowledge of what was going on.

White suggests that,

No linear account can give a correct description of what followed at Chicago--all too many events were happening at once; too many forces were present; the environment of television which dominated the convention itself, was, as we have seen, unsettled; and no single person had complete understanding of all that was happening while it was happening.<sup>21</sup>

There were really two competing but largely unconnected dramas occurring in Chicago during the convention week. The two were never as closely tied as they appeared to the television audiences. They were enacted with different casts on different stages, but television tied them together.

The most striking events occurred on the streets. On Sunday, August 18, 1968, the first of the demonstrators arrived in Chicago and made Lincoln Park their headquarters, as previously planned.

Throughout the week, more of the protestors arrived until there were about 2,000 demonstrators in the park when the convention began. The police had refused to issue permits for the crowds to spend the night in Lincoln Park. A curfew had been established and the decision was made by police and city officials to enforce it. This decision was to precipitate the violence that occurred during the next week.

It was the clearing of the demonstrators from Lincoln Park that led directly to the violence;

symbolically, it expressed the city's opposition to the protestors; literally--it forced the protestors into confrontation with the police in Old Town and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The area near Lincoln Park was a scene of police ferocity exceeding that shown on television Wednesday night. From Sunday night through Tuesday night incidents of intense and indiscriminate violence occurred in the streets after police had swept the park clear of demonstrators. Demonstrators attacked too. But it was the police who forced them out of the park and into the neighborhood. And on the part of the police there was enough wild club swinging . . . enough gratuitous beating to make the conclusion inescapable that individual policemen, and lots of them, committed violent acts far in excess of the requisite force . . . To read dispassionately the hundreds of statements describing the events of Sunday and Monday nights is to become convinced of what can only be called a police riot.<sup>22</sup>

All during Tuesday, the streets remained relatively calm. In spite of what the Walker Report documents as extensive provocation by the demonstrators, the police and national guard were able to handle the crowds while remaining passive. The day culminated with two separate marches leading to Grant Park across from the Hilton Hotel. A crowd estimated at about 5,000 demonstrators faced first the police skirmish lines and later the National Guardsmen who were called in to relieve them. In spite of continued provocation from protestors, including abusive language and numerous thrown missiles, both the police and National Guard remained passive and the crowd finally dispersed early Wednesday morning with no real violence occurring.

Most of the violence that was to become synonymous with the Chicago convention occurred on Wednesday evening. The

news media were prepared to cover it and it took place in front of the Hilton, providing easy access for people from the news media.

There were some incidents of violence during the day as the police broke up a rally at the bandshell in the park between Columbus and Lake Shore Drive. But it was what occurred between 7:30 and 8:30 on Wednesday evening, while the Democrats were nominating a man for the Presidency, that was to be seen throughout the world. At 7:57 as a crowd of 2,000 to 3,000 demonstrators occupied the Balbo-Michigan intersection, the police, who had established skirmish lines on both Michigan and Balbo began to surge into the crowd, beating the demonstrators (and onlookers) without regard for provocation or passivity.

The indiscriminate police violence that occurred during this incident affected all of the crowd, whether protestor or passersby:

No one could accuse the Chicago cops of discrimination. They savagely attacked hippies, yippies, New Leftists, revolutionaries, dissident Democrats, newsmen, photographers, passers-by, clergymen, and at least one cripple. Winston Churchill's journalist grandson got roughed up. Playboy's Hugh Hefner took a whack on the backside. The police even victimized a member of the British Parliament, Mrs. Anne Kerr, a vacationing Laborite who was maced outside the Conrad Hilton and hustled off to the lockup.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to prevent extensive coverage of what was happening on the streets, the police began to attack newsmen who were covering the riots. The Walker report

documents incidents of the police clubbing cameramen and destroying photographic equipment too numerous to be entirely coincidental.

As the reports of police violence aimed at newsmen and photographers began to spread, the news organizations responded in anger:

The Professional journalistic society, Sigma Delta Chi, the AFL-CIO, the Chicago Newspaper Guild, several newspapers, and two broadcasting networks protested the beatings of reporters by police and demanded that Police Commissioner J. B. Conlisk curb his men's rough handling of reporters and photographers.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, eight top executives of newsgathering operations<sup>25</sup> wrote a telegram directly to Mayor Daley protesting the treatment received by their people.

A footnote to the police violence took place early Friday morning, after the convention had finished its business and begun to disperse. The convention had closed at 12:10 a. m. on Friday, and both Humphrey and McCarthy had retreated to their headquarters in the Hilton Hotel. The fifteenth floor of the Conrad Hilton was occupied by McCarthy's volunteer workers.

Shortly before dawn on Friday morning, the police invaded the fifteenth floor on the pretense that something was thrown from that floor at them. Though they were without warrants or evidentiary support for any arrests, the police proceeded to club several of the campaign workers and then forcibly cleared the floor. It was only when confronted

by Senator McCarthy, who determined that the officers were without command, that the police released their captives. Senator McCarthy delayed his departure from Chicago for an extra day, on the advice of his Secret Service guards, in order to prevent a recurrence of this incident.

While the streets of Chicago were often virtually under siege, the Democratic Party conducted its business. In sharp contrast to the smooth flow of events during the Republican convention in Miami, the Democratic convention produced controversial and often bitter floor fights over important issues.

In the week before the convention began, the committees began meeting to determine which of the delegations would be seated, whether the "unit rule" would continue to apply, and, most important, to write the party's platform, including the all important Vietnam plank.

McCarthy's and Humphrey's supporters were able to agree on the decision to abolish the unit rule.

The Credentials Committee, which heard the challenges brought by the McCarthy forces against delegations they felt were either racially biased or chosen in an undemocratic manner, was able to develop new rules for delegate selection to be applied to the 1972 convention. In addition, they presented six disputes that would be settled on the floor of the convention.

Most of the attention and media coverage was focused on the Platform Committee which had the task of developing and presenting a plank on Vietnam that could be approved by the whole convention. The eventual outcome was to present to the convention a majority plank, which supported President Johnson's policies and to which Humphrey was tied by his base of support, and a minority plank, backed by the McCarthy forces and calling for a substantial reversal of the Johnson posture. The debate was long and heated. It was this issue that was to divide the Democratic Party in 1968.

By the time the convention began on Monday night, August 26, the battle lines had been drawn and, in reality, most of the issues had already been decided. The Humphrey forces had things pretty well in control. The media predictions indicated that Humphrey had sufficient support to win a first ballot nomination.

What followed, though preordained, divided the party severely. Humphrey, while he had enough votes to insure his nomination, did not have strong, loyal support. He was not a popular choice; rather, he was chosen because the party regulars preferred him to the McCarthy insurgents.

Tuesday provided some minor victories for the McCarthy supporters as the convention voted to seat the Mississippi challenge delegation and half of the Georgia challenge, but those were really all of the victories that McCarthy won (except, of course, for the revamping of the delegate selection

procedures, also supported by Humphrey, which had so great an effect on the 1972 Democratic convention). On Tuesday evening, after another heated floor fight, the convention voted 1,567  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1,041  $\frac{1}{4}$  to accept the Humphrey-Johnson Vietnam resolution.

Wednesday evening brought both the formal nomination of Hubert Humphrey and the violence in front on the Conrad Hilton that was broadcast by the media.

By Thursday evening, the convention had conducted its business and was ready to close. It closed with a pro-Johnson Vietnam resolution, Hubert Humphrey as its standard bearer, and a massive split in the party. The debate on Vietnam had been so heated and the issue so important that the party could not close ranks behind the candidate. McCarthy declared that he could not support either the party's candidate or the Vietnam resolution. There was also much debate over the actions in the streets and Humphrey's support of both Mayor Daley and his tactics in defending Chicago.

#### Summary

This chapter has presented a brief background of the political situation and the events that occurred during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

The television coverage provided by the TV networks was to include both the workings of the convention and the drama in the streets. How this coverage of both the convention and



the events it precipitated was to affect both the convention and those who saw it will be considered in the following chapters.

The events took place along two different courses in different places, but television was to present them almost as if they were a single drama. The two were certainly connected and both contained the elements of conflict, but the physical and the verbal were on different planes, with different participants and different consequences.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gallup Opinion Index, No. 40, October, 1968 (Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1968 (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>These included 3 by the Republican Party, 1 by Robert F. Kennedy, and 1 for Lyndon Johnson by the Democratic National Committee, quoted in White, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>White, pp. 109-10.

<sup>5</sup>Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968 (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>White, p. 325.

<sup>7</sup>Chester, p. 352.

<sup>8</sup>White, p. 329.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Whiteside, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial Process, Chicago," Columbia Journalism Review, 4 (Winter, 1968), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup>Chester, p. 580.

<sup>11</sup>Chester, p. 574.

<sup>12</sup>Chester, p. 581.

<sup>13</sup>Chester, p. 581.

<sup>14</sup>The Walker Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Rights in Conflict (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>White, p. 327.

<sup>16</sup>Dallas Morning News, 24 August 1968, p. 22A, col. 2.

<sup>17</sup>White, p. 327.

<sup>18</sup>Whiteside, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>White, p. 328.

<sup>20</sup>Walker, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>White, p. 345.

<sup>22</sup>Walker, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup>Dallas Morning News, 28 August 1968, p. 5A, col. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup>These included L. H. Goldman, president of ABC; B. K. Howard, president of Field Enterprises (Chicago Sun Times and Daily News); Dr. Frank Stanton, president of CBS; Otis Chandler, publisher of the Los Angeles Times; Julian Goldman, president of NBC; A. O. Sulzberger, publisher of the New York Times; Hedley Donovan, editor in chief of Time, Inc.; and Katharine Graham, president of the Washington Post Company (owner of the Post and Newsweek magazine).

## CHAPTER III

### TV'S EFFECTS ON THE CONVENTION

The delegates to the 1968 Democratic National Convention began to arrive in Chicago during the week preceding the convention. It was a mixed group of individuals who had come to nominate a candidate for the Presidency and to shape the course of the Democratic Party for 1968 and 1972.

There were both professional politicians and amateurs who were involved not because they were in the party's mainstream, but because they supported a specific policy or candidate. All during the preceding week, the preliminary hearings of the Rules, Credentials, and Platform committees were taking place and the results had been covered and analyzed by the press. Television coverage of these early meetings gave the delegates their first information about the outcome and arguments of various challenges and positions.

In addition, television had provided detailed information not only about the precautions being taken by the authorities, but also about the activities and plans of the demonstrators in Chicago. Both of the major networks covering the Democratic convention (NBC and CBS were to provide extensive, continuous coverage, while ABC was limiting its coverage to ninety-minute summaries and highlights each

evening) had featured news items detailing such activities as karate practice and washoi techniques (techniques developed by Japanese protestors to limit the effectiveness of police dispersal procedures) and the plans developed by the protest leaders to ridicule the convention's candidate and disrupt its workings.<sup>1</sup> These news items had already exposed the delegates to information, sometimes factual and sometimes erroneous, which would help them to form the attitude with which they would approach the convention. The delegates did not come to Chicago "blind"; most already knew of what was being done and what was being planned by both the police and demonstrators. The expectation of confrontation was already there when the delegates began to arrive and it was enhanced by the overly stringent precautions being enforced by the convention organizers. The oppressive security helped to change the delegates' mood from apprehension to irritation like that shown by New York delegate Alex Rosenberg, when after two days of harassment he exploded, "I wasn't sentenced and sent here! I was elected."<sup>2</sup>

There were basically two kinds of delegates who attended the 1968 Democratic convention, and their attitude and response to the events was shaped by the characteristics which caused them to seek the chance to attend the convention.

Soule and Clarke studied the delegates in attendance at the 1968 Democratic National Convention and found that there

were two distinct types of delegates, which they labeled the amateur and the conventional or professional party activist.

The amateur was described as being an individual who entered the political contest because he was committed to a particular policy or an ideological position. He was concerned with the outcome of a particular issue, such as the Vietnam policy, or a group of issues:

The amateur Democrat was one who perceived politics as the determination of public policy in which issues were settled on their merits and not simply on the basis of partisan advantage. Thus, the amateur was more reluctant to recognize the necessity of compromising issues for partisan advantage.<sup>3</sup>

The professional party activist, on the other hand, was an individual who worked within the party structure on a more general basis. He was concerned with winning elections because it was by winning elections that the party retained the political power necessary to perpetuate itself. The professional was as pragmatic and flexible as necessary to promote the party's victory in 1968.

In contrast to the amateur, the professional party activist wanted to win elections and provide the inducement which followers require for participation. The professional was not concerned with taking positions on controversial and abstract public policies. His preoccupation with winning allowed him to compromise substantive programs more easily than the amateur. Intraparty democracy . . . was valued extrinsically for the purpose of creating party unity (i.e., to forge as broad a coalition as possible), rather than for its own intrinsic worth.<sup>4</sup>

Amateurs and professionals within the Democratic party differed not only in ideology, but in attitude and background as well. Soule and Clarke found that age was the best predictor of amateur status (the amateurs were significantly younger). Amateurs were more often elected to the convention, while professionals were more often appointed (approximately 50 per cent to 67 per cent). Amateurs had attended fewer conventions than the professionals (for example, 72 per cent of the amateurs had attended only the 1968 convention, compared to 52 per cent for the professionals). The professionals were found to be far more likely to vote for the apparent winner to promote party unity (5 per cent of amateurs to 27 per cent of professionals). And significantly, amateurs preferred McCarthy far more than did professionals (41 per cent to 7 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, on Monday evening, August 26th the Democratic National Convention prepared to open with the streets of Chicago in turmoil and two groups of delegates who differed not only in a choice of candidates, perhaps, but in philosophy and purpose as well. These differences became important because the responses made by the two types to the information that television brought them was different, and these differences broadened the split in the Democratic party and emphasized it to the viewing audience.

The nature and scope of the political convention has changed in the past twenty-five years. The advent and

increased use of television during this period has helped to impel some of these changes. Until television, the workings of a national party convention were obscure to the average party member and voter. The convention was covered by newspapers, of course, and radio, but it was not until the widespread television coverage that the processes of nomination became visible to the local constituencies. Television's ability to visualize the political process has required those who are in control of the convention to take the medium into account when structuring a convention. In order to make the nominating process palatable and understandable to the viewing audience, the men in charge have had to adapt the "style" and tenor of a convention. They have been forced to concern themselves with the party's "image". Perhaps, even more importantly, the increased television coverage of political conventions has altered the nature and purpose of a party's nominating convention.

This chapter will detail some of the changes that television has brought upon political conventions. It will suggest that television became involved with the 1968 Democratic convention even before the convention began. The chapter will consider the general changes in political conventions against the background of events during the 1968 convention to determine the extent to which the "fact" of television coverage altered the functioning of the 1968 Democratic National Convention.



### Television's Role in Promoting Party Image

Television coverage of a national political convention is important to both the television networks and the political parties. Coverage of a convention gives TV networks the opportunity to display their news "stars" and to practice their live coverage skills. Conventions are not shown to produce high Nielson ratings or to make a profit for the networks. They are broadcast for professional prestige.<sup>6</sup> The broadcasts of the 1968 Democratic convention exemplify this situation. In 1968, both of the larger networks (NBC and CBS) covered the convention from the beginning of prime time until the end of the session, while ABC presented only ninety-minute summaries during the evening hours. ABC's ratings were higher than either NBC or CBS while they broadcast "regular" programming. It was only when ABC switched to their own convention programming that their ratings dropped below that of their competitors.<sup>7</sup> This type of viewer response was predictable, but in spite of this, both NBC and CBS broadcast the convention during all of their prime time schedule. Because of the enormous expenditures required for coverage of this type, all of the networks lost money on their convention coverage. Such coverage was not a profitable enterprise, but it was a public service and it gave the networks an image of "professionalism".

The political parties also gain from having the conventions televised, because it provides both the party and

its candidates with free publicity and exposure because they are making news. Part of its value is derived because it is news rather than advertisement. News has an impact separate from that of other media content. Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized this fact when he commented that if he could control what appeared on the front pages of the day's newspapers, the criticisms and comments appearing inside the paper would be unimportant.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the television networks and the political parties both have a stake in promoting broad television coverage of a convention. In 1968, the networks tried to assert their influence even before the convention began. The Republicans had their convention in Miami, Florida, and the networks would be saved a sizable expense if the Democrats moved their convention from its scheduled meeting place in Chicago to Miami. They applied as much pressure as possible in an effort to have the convention moved. According to Chester:

(Daley was) . . . right to resist the bland pressure of the television networks, which could, at a conservative estimate, have achieved economics of six million dollars had the Democrats, like the Republicans, held their forum in Miami Beach.<sup>9</sup>

White also noted that Miami was the major opponent of Chicago for the Democratic convention, because it had fine facilities and "moreover, press and TV favored it . . . why not, they argued, save the millions of dollars in electronic installations, the wear and tear on nerves and energies, that would be required to move from one city to another?"<sup>10</sup>

The Democrats responded to the pressure applied by the TV networks, but not in the manner they had hoped for. It was suggested that the Democrats might be willing to change their convention site in return for sizable contributions related to the amount of money saved by the networks:

Richard Salant, the president of CBS News, told me, just before the Republican convention, that "suggestions, not so subtle, were made to us that since the networks would save money on any move of the Democratic convention to Miami Beach we ought to pay up money we would thereby be saving. We turned these suggestions down. Personally, I think network television is vulnerable enough as it is, considering, for example, what it has done to sports . . . "11

Television's attempts to change the site of the Democratic convention and the Democrats' attempt to profit from such a change both proved unsuccessful.

The involvement of television with the choice of a convention site was of minor importance to the functioning of the convention and its roots were exclusively financial, an effort to save some of the enormous sums involved in this type of coverage. But, over the years, television has had a more profound effect on the convention process.

Television coverage of a national party convention has, in effect, altered the nature and purpose of the convention. The enormous importance of television coverage to a convention was noted as early as 1952 by Emory Bogardus, "While no prediction is made here that television will do away with the convention system, it will doubtless bring about fundamental changes in convention procedure."12

Television's role in altering the nature of political nominating conventions has been noted by both political scientists and speech communications scholars:

The most obvious, and perhaps most important, change brought about by television has been the complete change of focus of the conventions . . . The purpose of the convention is now not so much to nominate a candidate as to sell the obvious candidate to the public and to weld together the warring factions of the party after the various primaries.<sup>13</sup>

David, Goldman, and Bain also noted this tendency when they suggested that ". . . the media have helped to increase the pressure for nominating decisions that are early in fact, if not in form, so that the damage wrought by a highly contested nominating campaign can be prevented or repaired before the party has to face the opposition in the heat of the election campaign."<sup>14</sup>

Hahn has also suggested that this shift of emphasis from a nominating to a ratifying function was, at least partially, responsible for the demonstrations that arose in Chicago.

It must be added that the elimination of meaningful decision-making from conventions may cause more spectacles in the future, similar to the debacle in the streets of Chicago.<sup>15</sup>

The increased use of television coverage of national party conventions has made these conventions more visible to the public. The party politicians and "bosses" can no longer regard the convention as a bargaining session in which favors and programs can be traded openly by the candidates to secure

the nomination. The prevasiveness of the television cameras has opened some of the well-known "smoke-filled rooms."

Conventions now serve as a valuable means of enhancing the party's image. To capitalize on television's ability to promote the party's image, those in control of party activities have begun to alter the convention procedures and timing. Hahn has suggested that audience enlargement is the primary reason behind many of the recent changes in political conventions:

Almost all of the changes which television has forced upon political conventions has been designed to attract and hold the home audience . . . The conventions have been streamlined for the convenience of the voters in television land . . .<sup>16</sup>

It has been suggested that the national party conventions are conducted primarily for the purpose of attracting and pleasing an audience rather than for their stated purpose of conducting the party's business.

Conventions tend to become not national caucuses of politicians, but public spectacles, designed less for deliberation (or dealing) among the participants than the delight (or entertainment) of an audience.<sup>17</sup>

While the view of the convention as mainly a form of audience entertainment is probably overly cynical, it does seem likely that there is some attempt to please and influence the audience by those who are making the arrangements and planning the campaign.

This element of the theatrical has had its effect on the convention planning, because, since the convention is more

visible to the voter, it becomes identified more with the party's candidate. The viewing public uses this early exposure as a means of identifying and judging the party's candidate. The candidate's convention address is no longer seen only by those in attendance (who are already among the party faithful), but it is transmitted, live, across the country to be seen by opponents and independents as well. Hahn has argued that this has caused the candidate to "soften" his image by excluding the vehement denunciation of the opposing party that used to mark convention addresses prior to the coverage of television.<sup>18</sup>

Television has almost certainly caused the political parties to become more concerned with the image they project during the convention because the convention no longer occurs as a process leading up to the beginning of the campaign. The national party convention has become, in reality, the beginning of the party's drive for the Presidency. David, Goldman, and Bain suggested this, saying ". . . the conventions are increasingly treated as the kickoff of the election campaign rather than merely the climax of the nominating campaign."<sup>19</sup>

Concern over the party's image among the electorate has produced an important side effect of the party convention. It tended to lessen the importance and visibility of the party "boss". The machinations of the "boss" do not present the image of democracy and participation which both parties suggest often and loudly that they represent:

An effect of television upon conventions which has been widely applauded has been the seeming demise of the bosses. This, of course, stems in part from the foregoing point--if the purpose of the convention is more to ratify than to nominate, the boss has no deals to make. He can no longer function on the floor because the camera has stereotyped him (as a villainous boss rather than a great leader).<sup>20</sup>

An explanation for this has been suggested by E. S. Bogardus. He argued that the exposure tends to drive the bosses further behind the scenes than was usual. The bosses are forced to use their influence behind the scenes because to operate openly, on the floor of the convention, is to create an unfavorable image. The public image of the "boss" at work is hardly a flattering one. Bogardus suggested after watching the bosses work on the floor of the 1952 conventions that television would force a change:

. . . some observers expressed plain disgust and indicated that the so-called democratic process "had been made to look silly." One cannot definitely say that the unfavorable reactions outnumbered the favorable ones, but doubtless the "bosses" in the future will be more forehanded and subtle.<sup>21</sup>

This tendency of the parties to enhance their image by removing the "bosses" from public view did not prove successful for the Democrats in 1968. Mayor Richard Daley, probably the most important of the old-time Democratic bosses, seemed to rule the convention with an iron hand. This heavy-handed approach is in marked contrast to the direction in which the parties were moving. Commenting on Bogardus' prediction of the more subtle influence of the bosses, Hahn noted that

"with the single exception of the machinations of Mayor Daley in 1968, the prediction has been accurate."<sup>22</sup>

The 1968 Democratic National Convention is notable because this tendency did not operate. The television viewer saw clearly the heavy hand of Mayor Richard Daley on the convention workings. Thus, the image of the Democratic "bosses", as portrayed by TV, was not a good one. In 1968, it appeared that "Democratic" was more a title than an operating principle.

In order to have some control over the image of the party that the televised convention creates, those in control of the party began to assert their ability to control the working of the convention. If the professional party politicians could "orchestrate" the convention, they would be able to display the image they were trying to establish.

The process of orchestration began with the actual convention schedules and physical arrangements. The professionals, already in control, were, as noted earlier, much less inclined to support McCarthy than the party amateurs. With Robert Kennedy no longer in the race for the nomination, Humphrey was virtually assured of victory. Thus Humphrey's supporters saw their task as being to put on a show of party solidarity for the television viewers. They began by assuring that the audience would see what would appear to be a convention strongly united behind Hubert Humphrey.



They (Humphrey's forces) not only could order the convention arrangements so that the messy but ritualistically necessary business of the floor fights could fall in hours safely out of prime time, but also in prime time they could present their own spokesmen . . . 23

After arranging the timing of the convention to suit their purposes, the organizers effected a seating arrangement that would provide the best picture of party unity for the "folks" at home.

Clearly, the only kind of television coverage the convention organizers liked was that focused on the platform, where the camera could pan across the image of loyalty: Hale Boggs, Carl Albert, and Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, the keynote speaker and a longtime admirer of Johnson. Drop the focus a few inches and there, in the choicest seats . . . , loomed the stern-faced ranks of the Texas and Illinois delegations, at their respective heads the hard, handsome figure of "Juan John" Connally and Mayor Daley. 24

When the convention hall had been arranged and the schedule set so that the maximum effect would be achieved, it became necessary to assure that the TV networks broadcast what they were supposed to. To this end, those in charge placed unusual limitations on the number of mobile cameras to be allowed in the Amphitheatre and placed other stumbling blocks in the way of the networks such as those mentioned in Chapter II. Of course, the Democrats weren't restricting the networks to limit TV coverage, they were simply trying to protect the delegates . . .

. . . the limitations placed on camera crews on the floor of the convention were hardly justified by the arguments of the convention's executive director, John B. Criswell, Treasurer of the DNC.

"Many people feel that electronic media all but infringe the rights of the delegates." The delegates? As every television cameraman knows, nothing pleases a delegate more than the opportunity to retail his views to the nation. But the convention floor, of course, was infested with anti-administration views. A wave of Daley's hand was all it took to prompt the convention band to brassy renditions of "It's a Grand Old Flag" or "Happy Days are Here Again."<sup>25</sup>

The length to which members of the Democratic National Committee went to "orchestrate" the 1968 convention were often comical. On Wednesday, the TV networks broadcast scenes of some of the delegates ignoring speeches being given from the podium by reading newspapers on the floor. To prevent its recurrence, on Thursday, the DNC instructed the security guards to refuse admittance to any delegates carrying newspapers.<sup>26</sup> Another incident happened on Thursday which pointed up the Committee's efforts:

On Thursday, while Humphrey was making his acceptance speech, Greenberg, in Floor Control, noticed a little man behind Humphrey who was wearing a microphone headset. Every time Humphrey paused for applause, a signal was passed to the little man by J. Leonard Reinsch of the DNC. The little man said something urgently into his microphone, and across the hall the bandleader immediately raised his baton and had his men strike up hearty chords to swell the noise of the applause. The shots were fed into the network in the form of intercuts, one following another, without any explanation of the connection between the little man, Reinsch, the bandleader, and the applause. When that happened, Reinsch saw the shots of himself and his crew on television. The result was that Reinsch said something to the little man, and thereafter, the little man deliberately withheld his signal to the bandleader, who could be seen on the CBS monitors looking absolutely baffled that he couldn't get the sign to do his bit in a Presidential nomination acceptance speech cued for music.<sup>27</sup>

### Television's Information Function

While television coverage of a convention serves as the cause of changes in the convention's operations or its function, television is also involved actively with what is happening on the convention floor. Television is the primary source of information for the delegates at the convention. This aspect of the televising process was especially important during the Democratic Convention of 1968.

Normally the candidate, who remains in his hotel, is able to keep in touch with the people handling his campaign on the floor through a complex hookup of telephone lines and portable radio transmitters. Questions and instructions are relayed to the convention site by phone and broadcast to the floor managers among the delegates. Thus, the candidate is able to stay away from the convention site (as is customary) and still retain fairly tight control over his campaign organization.

In 1968, the telephone strike in Chicago changed that. The striking workers installed only a minimum of lines into the Amphitheatre, and none into the hotels. A radio hookup of the type necessary to maintain the usual level of communications was simply not feasible. The candidates in Chicago were isolated from the floor of the convention and their people who served on it. They were limited in what they could see and hear much more than normal. The candidates were forced to use the television coverage as their eyes and ears

in the convention. (It is, of course, true that the candidates did have more sources, such as radio links, than an average viewer would. But, at the same time, the candidate's need for large amounts of detailed information is vastly greater than the average viewers.)

Not only were the candidates limited in their ability to communicate but the delegates were even more restricted. They shared the candidate's lack of access to direct lines of communication and they were faced with police security that can only be called oppressive. Their movements were curtailed and their contacts were limited. The delegates, also, were forced to rely on the television coverage for their information:

The delegates, locked on their floor, and, at Chicago, pinioned in place by rigid police controls, could scarcely even know what was happening in their midst except as they gathered it through radio and television, which assembled fragments from their galloping electronic horsemen and re-broadcast them back directly to the floor below. Delegates thus lived in an echo chamber; and so, as a matter of fact, did the reporters themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Television's function as an information source for the delegates was to become very important on Wednesday evening when the scenes of violence in the streets were broadcast. It was then, when the information that television conveyed, reached the delegates, that the TV coverage helped to alter the responses and attitudes of the delegates, especially the amateur delegates. The amateurs were issue oriented and

their main issue was the war. It was an issue shared by most of those in the streets. Many of the delegates responded to the broadcasts in anger and combined with the amateurs' pre-existing refusal to compromise on substantive issues, their response prevented the convention from uniting behind the party's candidate. According to White:

On their portable TV sets, the delegates are also seeing for the first time what has happened over an hour ago. They think, quite reasonably, that Chicago is running in blood, at the very moment of their proceedings. Allard Lowenstein rises to demand the convention adjourn; no business should be conducted here while "people's rights are being abused on the streets, maced and beaten unconscious." Frank Mankiewicz of Robert Kennedy's staff talks on screen about the streets of Chicago "flowing with blood." At one point a misunderstood television film clip of earlier violence indicates the rioting is breaking out fresh.<sup>29</sup>

There was little unity in the response of the delegates and candidates to the events in the streets of Chicago. Humphrey supported the mayor's actions, while the anti-war delegates responded angrily:

Back in the convention hall, the peace forces had made a tactical decision to move for an adjournment. Bob Maytag, . . . from Colorado, requested the chair to compel Mayor Daley to suspend his "police state" tactics . . . The slight figure of Senator Abraham Ribicoff came to the podium. . . . In the middle of his address, he said, "With George McGovern we wouldn't have Gestapo tactics on the streets of Chicago." Stunned silence. The pandemonium. The cameras focused on Daley, purple with rage and mouthing an expletive that looked to millions of lipreading television viewers like an expression he was said never to use.<sup>30</sup>

The enmity that was created by different responses to the violence that television portrayed lasted until the end

of the convention. After Hubert Humphrey was safely nominated for the Presidency, the party went through a traditional process designed to help unite the delegates behind the candidate, but even that was not to be:

At midnight, an Illinois delegate moved, a traditional gesture at these gatherings, that the nomination be made unanimous. No vote was taken. Albert declared the motion carried while hundreds of delegates yelled hoarsely, "No, no, no." Lowenstein and Goodwin, prescient to and beyond, the bitter end, had a supply of a thousand candles borrowed from a Chicago synagogue. Now they were distributed to disconsolate McCarthy delegates to carry on a "funeral march" through downtown Chicago.<sup>31</sup>

#### Delegates' Use of Television

Television does more for the delegates than just provide information. Television coverage has become a tactic that can be used to create and spread rumors throughout the convention. A rumor fed into the television coverage of a convention not only gains instantaneous transmission all over the convention hall, but the message being carried achieves greater validity because it is being carried as a news item by the major networks. The rumor-spreading facet of convention coverage was very much in evidence during the Democratic convention in Chicago. The reporters are aware of their utility to some delegates in spreading rumors, and they make a concerted effort to avoid broadcasting them, but the speed and complexity of the action on the floor makes adequate screening impossible.

The familiar faces of television's correspondents made them prime targets for subtly contrived political rumors. Because of the instantaneous transmission that television affords, the potential for serious mischief is enormous. All the floormen say they refuse to air tips until they have checked the source. But last week the normally astute TV reporters<sup>32</sup> apparently swallowed a record number of lures.

Time magazine took a somewhat different view of the reporters' astuteness when it suggested, "In the inexhaustible air time to be filled, TV reporters kited and killed rumors with seeming abandon."<sup>33</sup>

In spite of any efforts by the TV reporters to check their facts, it was obvious that TV was broadcasting some stories that were more rumor than fact. After the peace plank failed, television reported that a movement was growing on the convention floor for peace delegates to leave the proceedings and hold a rump convention elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> It was a movement that was not noted by other observers and which seemed to have little substance.

CBS announced on two evenings that Lyndon Johnson would probably arrive the next day to attend a birthday celebration for him that had been planned. The rumor was abruptly dropped with no explanation being given and Johnson never arrived.

Newsweek magazine noted that both CBS and NBC were playing the rumor game, saying "both CBS and NBC fueled the Ted Kennedy boomlet with such relentlessness that event CBS commentator Eric Sevareid later conceded that the Kennedy threat was 'partly the creation of TV'."<sup>35</sup>

The "candidacy" of Ted Kennedy is an excellent example of the manner in which television spread and supported rumors in Chicago. Theodore White suggests that "if a moment of nearness to a real Kennedy candidacy came, it came and passed in a five minute period some time at 4:30 on Tuesday afternoon of the convention."<sup>36</sup> It was at this point that a meeting between the Kennedy and McCarthy forces took place. Nothing came of the meeting and Ted Kennedy never became a candidate for the Democratic nomination.

The television networks, however, showed the possible Kennedy candidacy differently. It was a dramatic idea and the networks played it for all it was worth. White described the television networks treatment of the already defunct candidacy:

So we return to the convention floor on Tuesday night; the Kennedy candidacy has ended, unknown to most, hours before. But on the floor it is reaching its peak before the nation's viewing audience and delegates alike.<sup>37</sup>

Television covered the already dead story with a tenacity that is almost amusing:

By Tuesday evening, when the convention convenes again at 6:03, TV has found in the Kennedy boom the jugular it had been seeking in the convention story. . . . Now, a sudden romantic unity is given by the surge to Teddy Kennedy . . . Across the floor, flogged on by their directors in the control booths, speed the reporters of the great networks in competitive and artistic rivalry to make the story clear.<sup>38</sup>

The Kennedy story had ended at 4:30 in the afternoon, but the drama of its television coverage reached its peak much later in the evening.



The story of the Kennedy boom, as it crests now, between ten and eleven on Tuesday evening, before the eyes of the nation is, however, not that way at all, nor has it been so for hours.<sup>39</sup>

Thomas Whiteside, in the CBS control booth at the convention, was able to see how the television coverage of the Kennedy candidacy and the support for such a draft on the floor were able to feed and strengthen each other.

This alleged boom actually had never got beyond the stage of a few sputtering fuses, most of which had the appearance to me of having been lighted around the place by eager network floor correspondents rather than by Kennedy's men. I had seen how, after these correspondents had been pumping away for a few hours at the notion of a Kennedy boom, a number of hand-lettered "DRAFT TED KENNEDY" signs, got up by people who presumably were not unaware of what the correspondents were saying on television, began to appear on the convention floor. When the signs appeared, the TV cameras that were endlessly panning around the hall searched them out as visual confirmation of the so-called boom. It seemed to me to be a case of Kennedy signs and Zoomar lenses encouraging one another.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, it appears that the "Kennedy boom" was actually more of a hope in the minds of some delegates which gained stature and support as television relentlessly covered the "story". It became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Television coverage of Kennedy's increasing support caused the support for Kennedy to increase. There were, of course, a hard core group of Kennedy supporters who were prepared to vote for Kennedy even without the coverage, but if Teddy had not had the magic Kennedy name, the story would probably have faded on Tuesday afternoon and remained dormant on the floor.

The process of televising a convention is a reporting process. The reporters and the cameras are supposed to remain apart from what is happening, to observe it, and to transmit it to the television audience. But the reporters and commentators are skilled in politics and aware of what is going on. They try to report not only the actions, but also the causes and motivations of the events. Because of their investigation and analysis, the networks sometimes (although seldom) alter the stories they report. The candidacy of Julian Bond is an example of how the television networks can affect the outcome of their stories:

Sometimes they got so close to the action they actually joined it. When Wisconsin nominated Georgia delegate Julian Bond for the Vice-Presidency, NBC's John Chancellor was the first to ask the twenty-eight-year old Negro if he wasn't legally too young for the post. A startled Bond promised to check it out--and wound up citing this bit of legal lore as his reason for asking that his name be taken out of nomination.<sup>41</sup>

#### Summary

A medium such as television is sure to have an effect on an event as complex and important as a national political convention. Such an event is important to both the participants who are involved and to those watching at home because the decisions made will control not only the course of American politics for the next four years, but also the day to day happenings in the lives of the voters. A ballot cast for a candidate and a party is also taken as a "mandate" for a complex weave of priorities and philosophies.

The candidates' positions are defined by a formal statement of position (the party platform) and those positions the audience perceives him to support. It is through the press (and especially television) that the public is able to acquire the necessary information to form a judgment of the candidates. In order to ensure that the public's image of a candidate is the "correct" one, the party must alter its convention to meet the needs of television coverage.

There are general directions in which the parties move to enhance the appeal and awareness generated by television coverage. The parties try to schedule a convention that will entertain the audience so that the convention will gain maximum exposure. Those in control of the convention itself will try to arrange for their spokesmen to appear during "prime time", so that they will be seen by as many viewers as possible. The necessity for carefully guarding the party's image has forced the bosses into a less visual role.

In 1968, the delegates arrived divided by ideology and purpose. The problems attached to the convention, both in the streets and on the floor, from riots to heated platform debates, widened those divisions. Eugene McCarthy, though essentially a party regular, refused to support the nominee chosen in the convention. McCarthy did elect not to participate in a proposed fourth party, which would be formed to nominate him; but he stopped short of urging support of the Democratic ticket by his followers. The picture of the

Democratic party of 1968 that television showed was not the illusion of unity that typified the Republicans in Miami, but a picture of strife and dissension. The changes the Democrats made and the ones they should have made did not permit the party to project the type of image they desired.

As important as the role of television in creating an image of the party is, probably the most important role that television played in the 1968 Democratic convention was its function as a source of information for the delegates. The 1968 convention was unusual because of the increased isolation of the delegates. The telephone workers' strike isolated the delegates from the candidates and the excessive security isolated them from direct sources of information about what was happening in the streets. Television's role as an information source expanded by necessity and its influence on the convention increased as a result. The ability of television to add importance to, or kill, the normal political rumors and speculation made it a force to be considered and used. Its importance to the delegates lay not so much in television's broadcasting of an image as in its ability to legitimize a position (or a candidate) by instantaneous transmission of supporting views.

## NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup>Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968 (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 603.
- <sup>3</sup>John W. Soule and James W. Clarke, "Amateurs and Professionals: A Study of Delegates to the 1968 Democratic National Convention," American Political Science Review, 64 (Annual, 1970), 888.
- <sup>4</sup>Soule and Clark, p. 888.
- <sup>5</sup>Soule and Clark, pp. 893-896.
- <sup>6</sup>Frank, p. 93.
- <sup>7</sup>Thomas Whiteside, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial Process, Chicago," Columbia Journalism Review, 4 (Winter, 1968), 38.
- <sup>8</sup>Chester, p. 563.
- <sup>9</sup>Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1968 (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), p. 324.
- <sup>10</sup>Whiteside, p. 45.
- <sup>11</sup>Emory S. Bogardus, "Television and Political Conventions," Sociology and Social Research, 37 (November-December, 1952), 116.
- <sup>12</sup>Don Hahn, "The Effect of Television on Presidential Campaigns," Today's Speech, 18, No. 2 (Spring, 1970), 7.
- <sup>13</sup>Paul J. David, Ralph M. Goldman, and Richard C. Bain, The Politics of National Party Conventions (Washington: The Bookings Institute, 1960), p. 306.
- <sup>14</sup>Hahn, p. 7.
- <sup>15</sup>Hahn, p. 8.
- <sup>16</sup>Emmet John Hughes, "52,000,000 TV Sets - How Many Votes?," The New York Times Magazine, 5 September 1960, p. 78.

<sup>17</sup>Hahn, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup>David, p. 306.

<sup>19</sup>Hahn, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Bogardus, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup>Hahn, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>William R. Brown, "Television and the Democratic National Convention of 1968," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55, No. 3 (October, 1969), 237.

<sup>23</sup>Chester, p. 603.

<sup>24</sup>Chester, p. 603.

<sup>25</sup>Whiteside, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup>Whiteside, p. 41.

<sup>27</sup>White, p. 352.

<sup>28</sup>White, p. 376.

<sup>29</sup>Chester, p. 584.

<sup>30</sup>Chester, p. 586.

<sup>31</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup>White, p. 353.

<sup>34</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup>White, p. 353.

<sup>36</sup>White, p. 354.

<sup>37</sup>White, pp. 351-2.

<sup>38</sup>White, p. 352.

<sup>39</sup>Whiteside, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 69.

<sup>41</sup>Bogardus, p. 116.

## CHAPTER IV

### TV'S EFFECTS ON THE CONVENTION BROADCAST

The 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago encompassed two distinct conflicts. Within the convention, the forces of Hubert H. Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy vied for the party's presidential nomination. On the streets, the protestors and the Chicago police were often engaged in massive and violent confrontations.

The rivalry between Humphrey and McCarthy was part of the convention process. In spite of Humphrey's strong pre-convention support that virtually assured him of the nomination, it was assumed by both the attending delegates and the television audience that there would be at least some competition by McCarthy and others for the convention's vote.

Confrontation in the streets, however, was not part of the convention. It was a response by people outside the party, neither elected nor appointed to participation. They came not to elect a nominee, but to disrupt and ridicule the proceedings. The convention met in a formal process to perform a specific task, while the protestors were interested in shaping public opinion through public awareness of their position.

Both of the groups relied on the televising process to present their "messages" to the American public. But

television does not have the same power that the press does to enable the viewer to separate its messages. Television could, perhaps, have presented the two competing dramas as different "shows", but it did not. Television coverage of the 1968 Democratic convention was a continuous flow of events becoming intertwined without a clear sense of distinction between the two. The clashes in the streets were not a part of the Democratic convention, but to the television audience this was neither as obvious nor as certain as it seems. In the public mind, the response to the convention by a relative handful of demonstrators was to overshadow the real, and often important, work the convention performed.

This chapter will discuss the role that television coverage of the convention and the events occurring simultaneously played in providing the viewer with an image of the 1968 Democratic convention. It will argue that the network representatives were angry at the overly stringent security precautions and at overt attacks on newsmen, and that their anger helped to shape the coverage that was broadcast. The chapter will also suggest that the competitive nature of television broadcasting causes the networks to edit their coverage for maximum drama, rather than for maximum accuracy. Finally, it will consider the nature of television coverage of an event and how such coverage can affect a candidacy such as Hubert Humphrey's in 1968.



### The Mood of the Media

As the television networks prepared to televise the 1968 Democratic National Convention from Chicago, they encountered problems from the very beginning. Their efforts to see the convention moved from Chicago to Miami had failed, and they were met with numerous restrictions they did not anticipate. The telephone workers' strike limited the networks' ability to provide live coverage from a variety of locations, and the Democratic National Committee drastically limited their cameras and reporters on the convention floor. When the television men arrived, the security measures in force prevented the networks from covering various incidents in the manner television felt they should be covered.

The television representatives arrived frustrated and angry and their anger came through in their coverage:

Their mood (the television men), their spirit was to color almost all that America, including the arriving delegates, would see of the grand gathering. And the mood of the television men was bitter to begin with.<sup>1</sup>

The pessimism of the media began even before the convention had opened. Walter Cronkite set the tone for the reporting that was to follow:

Walter Cronkite's closing statements on a convention eve telecast from the fortified Democratic "enclave" had achieved a prophetic coloring: The "Democratic convention is about to begin in a police state; there just doesn't seem to be any other way to say it."<sup>2</sup>

The mood of the media became even more bitter when rumors of the police attacking newsmen covering the street

rioting began to filter back to the Amphitheatre. These rumors were confirmed when members of the CBS broadcasting team were assaulted. Time magazine reported that "even while he was on the air, CBS floor reporter Dan Rather was flattened by two security men, one hit him in the stomach, the other in the back. Rather's colleague, Mike Wallace, was belted in the jaw by a guard and hustled out of the hall."<sup>3</sup>

Dan Rather was on the convention floor, attempting to cover the ejection of a Georgia delegate, when the altercation arose. He was assaulted by a security officer and the entire CBS crew was angered by the incident:

The television networks are now furious--Dan Rather, one of the few television stars loved even by other stars, a reporter whose high competence is matched by his good manners and ever-gentleness, has been slugged and beaten to the floor by a security agent. The television networks will avenge him by spreading their wrath on every security agent, every policeman, from now to the end of the convention.<sup>4</sup>

As the television reporters became angrier, their mood began to influence their objectivity, and their anger colored what they broadcast of the convention to the viewing public:

Before long, TV men were taking considerable time on the air just venting their grievances, coloring the whole proceedings with a tinge of anger. Disgusted by the whole spectacle, CBS's Eric Sevaried went so far as to call the session of the presidential balloting "the most disgraceful night in American political history."<sup>5</sup>

The view of the convention that both the viewers and the incoming delegates received was view that was filtered by the

televising process through the angry eyes of the television reporters:

A contagion of madness, a sense of helplessness, a sickening loss of control, denying order and identity to all, had been spreading by television and media for days prior to the climax of Wednesday.<sup>6</sup>

The mood of the media representatives was important, not because their occupation gives them any special influence on the viewing public, but because it was they who controlled the picture of the convention that television portrayed. Their anger became important because it began to shape the image of the event. The Dan Rather incident provided both the impetus for what was to follow and a dramatic incident for television to focus on:

The response of most newsmen was to strike back by giving the Chicago Police--and in many cases the city and the Democratic Convention as well--a verbal thrashing. CBS took almost grim delight in replaying in slow motion the decking of Dan Rather, somewhat as if he were Sonny Liston going down for the count. Several TV reporters protested that they were being shadowed by security forces, and NBC's Sander Vanocur at one point told his anchor booth and all America: "We can't work with all these gumshoes over our shoulders."

CBS placed great emphasis on the Dan Rather incident, and even Walter Cronkite, normally superbly calm under difficult or dramatic circumstances, lost his composure:

As the nation watched, CBS floorman Dan Rather was punched to the floor while covering the ejection of a regular Georgia delegate. Regaining his feet, Rather charged that an unidentified security guard had belted him in the stomach. Cronkite was incensed. "I think we've

got a bunch of thugs down there," he said, his voice quivering.<sup>8</sup>

CBS was not alone in allowing the mood of the media personnel to intrude upon its news reporting. NBC's team of stars and reporters was feeling the mood that was being transmitted by all of the media in Chicago. Their reporters were being followed and observed by men they presumed to be part of Mayor Daley's security team. Their response to the situation came across loud and clear on television:

Meanwhile, off camera, NBC's Sander Vanocur was telling Brinkley about the "unidentified faceless men" who were shadowing him around the floor of the amphitheatre, eavesdropping on his conversations with the control room. "We can't work with all these gumshoes over our shoulders," he said. An irate Brinkley relayed the complaint to the television audience--and soon the camera pictured Vanocur with three of the men hovering behind him.<sup>9</sup>

Chet Huntley, NBC's other news anchorman responded to the assaults on newsmen that were taking place, both in the convention hall and out in the streets. As more and more reports came in of police deliberately accosting newsmen and destroying cameras and video equipment, Huntley voiced his anger to the entire country:

Chicago police are going out of their way to injure newsmen, and prevent them from filming or gathering information on what is going on. The news profession in this city is now under assault by the Chicago police.<sup>10</sup>

The situation in Chicago was bad enough for it to cause responses from even the most seasoned newsmen. Of course, these critical comments did not come exclusively from the

television journalists. Newsmen from all of the news media repounded to the actions of the Chicago police in an angry fashion. The entire news profession was angry and hostile. Their comments were spread across both the press and the nation's television screens:

For most newsmen the week was one long grievance against the restrictions of the convention and the general air of repression in Mayor Daley's Chicago. "The only people who could possibly feel at ease at this convention," wrote New York Times Russell Baker, "are those who have been to a hanging." . . . CBS's Walter Cronkite concluded one night by complaining: "It makes us want to pack up our cameras and typewriters and go home."<sup>11</sup>

In the general air of criticism and violence that television gave the 1968 Democratic National Convention, television was soon to portray another type of violence for the viewing audience. The films and videotape of the street fighting in Chicago began to come in from the reporters outside the convention hall, and television was able to feed this, too, into the broadcast, intermingled with the actual convention events.

On CBS, Walter Cronkite was reporting that Mike Wallace had been hustled off the floor by security police after covering the Rosenberg incident (Wallace was detained briefly). Moments later the AIR screen glowed with searchlights and blue helmets-and for the first time that evening some 25 million viewers and the dozens of delegates tuned to portable sets witnessed the Battle of Michigan Avenue.<sup>12</sup>

Reports such as these that are critical of a party or a convention take an extra importance because they are delivered under the guise of a news report. Viewers tend to

identify with their favorite news broadcaster and this affinity adds credence to his reports that would not otherwise be present. The same reports coming from, for example, the Republican National Chairman would have less importance to the audience than ones coming from a personal news source. Moreover, the audience considers the reports coming from TV commentators to be more credible than those in newspapers or magazines.

Research reveals that viewers prefer personal news sources like Walter Cronkite, Chet Huntley, or local commentators to nonpersonal ones like Time or Newsweek. They regard personal sources as accurate, sincere, responsible, and impartial; they are willing to trust the word of commentators.<sup>13</sup>

From the foregoing discussion and from the previous chapters, the impression can be drawn that the coverage by the TV networks of the 1968 Democratic National Convention consisted largely of scenes of violence and confrontation. A reading of periodicals and other sources would also emphasize the extent of coverage of violence during the convention. The impact that the coverage produced suggests that scenes of the violence were both extensive and graphic. In response to the furor that arose, NBC executives studied the convention coverage and found that this was not the case. Coverage of the violent aspects of the convention was substantially less than it may have seemed to those in the viewing audience.

The time devoted to direct network coverage of the Convention totaled more than 35 hours. The time devoted to the pictures of the demonstrators

was 65 minutes, less than three percent of the total time. Of these 65 minutes, 30 were in prime time. . . . also of these 65 minutes, 12 were a resume of scenes already shown, a late night summary of events, and clearly labeled as such. These figures . . . apply to NBC only. It is my understanding that the parallel experience of other networks may differ in details, but points the same way.<sup>14</sup>

If network coverage of the violence was this limited, then why was there so much discussion and such heated response to the networks coverage? The answer seems to be that this coverage had an impact far out of proportion to its limited duration. Reuven Frank of NBC noted the impact of this coverage in the feedback that his network received:

The letters networks received make almost no mention of what happened inside the convention hall, and the polls, which at first showed 70 or 60 or 50 per cent of Americans siding with the Chicago police against the demonstrators have not even bothered to poll the country about what they thought of the Convention and its processes.<sup>15</sup>

### The Editing Process

The reason for the added impact of television coverage of the Chicago violence seems to lie in the competitive nature of television programming. All three major networks are constantly engaged in a competition for the viewing audience. The success or failure of a network's programming is judged by the number of viewers it attracts.

In Chicago, ABC was not really in direct competition, since they had decided to carry only limited convention coverage, but NBC and CBS were aligned directly opposite each

other. The success of their convention coverage would be determined by which network drew the largest segment of the viewing audience.

A television network is able to attract audiences by presenting the convention in its most dramatic light. TV emphasizes the dramatic elements of a political convention through the selection of the scenes and commentary they broadcast. There are a multitude of factions and personalities competing for the limited air time that television has. The director must select from these different viewpoints and actions those which will be broadcast to the audience. This editing process, a process of selection, gives the convention coverage its continuity and its story line. By selecting from the many possible scenes, the TV director can shape the coverage so that it presents virtually any story with dramatic impact.

On the convention floor someone can always be found to say anything, and it remains only for good direction to put the fragments together in a dramatic form. Neither delegates nor reporters can be blamed; only the mechanism and its programming, which calls for competitive and rival drama to hold audiences. If the script that night had called for the discovery and dissemination of a Southern revolt, or the candidacy of Lester Maddox, the reporters could have delivered that to the nation, too--all carved out of truth, from the lips of authentic and honest men on the floor.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas Whiteside observed the editing process of CBS, firsthand, at Chicago. He described the continuous editing process that takes place, from reporters selecting which



of the many films and videotapes to pass through to the control booth, until the director makes the final judgment about what the audience will see.

In the chain of all the hundreds of CBS people who in some way were interposed, through the exercise of some editorial judgment between reality and the images on the screen serving to represent it, Diamond (CBS's director) was the last, and in some instances the most vital link; a surrogate, almost, of the viewer himself in the living room.<sup>17</sup>

It was Diamond who was able to instill CBS's coverage with a sense of continuity not present in the diverse images he received.

By the manner of this instantaneous plucking from the scenes reflected in the rows of monitors and by his particular sequencing and juxtaposition of particular aspects of simultaneously occurring action, Diamond seemed to me to endow the final stream of images with a very special quality, to give the flow of subject matter a certain rhythm and texture.<sup>18</sup>

The editing of the tapes and film of the street violence in Chicago was done to present the story to the viewers in its most dramatic form. The scenes shown were those which would have the greatest impact when televised. They were chosen to make dramatic television, not necessarily to most accurately represent the actions they portrayed.

Inevitably, the videotape that was available was edited to present only the most dramatic action. When it was followed by the kind of editorial comment added by Cronkite on CBS, for instance, the total effect was sometimes lopsided. Indeed, NBC made the most dramatic use of its videotapes by running them with a minimum of comment--and in the process produced an indictment that let police brutality speak entirely for itself.<sup>19</sup>

The indictment that was produced was not necessarily a fair one, because the tapes shown were selected for dramatic impact and not for objective presentation of the facts. Moreover, the indictment was produced in the context of the Democratic National Convention. In spite of the fact that the events were a response to, and in no way part of, the convention, television linked the two as a part of the continuous convention coverage. It was not the type of coverage desired by the Democrats.

TV coverage of the downtown riots was spectacular but also unbalanced. Bad as the cops were, they looked worse on the screen, as one who saw both can attest. . . . The atmosphere of violence and disorder in which the Humphrey-Muskie ticket was chosen couldn't have been less auspicious. Had Nixon written the script himself, he could scarcely have improved it.<sup>20</sup>

It was not a flattering picture of the events in Chicago, and it was a picture that the Democrats could not avoid having linked to their nomination and their candidate.

The ugly spectacle of savage mass beatings . . . eventually erupted under floodlights and the shocked gaze of millions of television viewers. The sight of a policeman laying about with their billy clubs against a ghostly backdrop of tear gas . . . color (ed) the whole context of the nominating process in the convention hall.<sup>21</sup>

Television not only projected a bad impression of the entire convention, it was to deal a severe blow to the party's nominee, Hubert Humphrey. The strike by the telephone workers prevented live coverage of the action in the street, and the use of film and videotape interposed an unavoidable delay in

airing the scenes that TV showed. The timing of this delay by the networks was completely unintentional, but it was Humphrey who was to suffer from it. The television pictures of the nomination of the two competing candidates provides a striking contrast.

. . . there was a succession of shots following a speech by Governor Harold Hughes of Iowa placing the name of Senator McCarthy in nomination: people cheering, confetti fluttering down, people waving peace signs and McCarthy posters designed by Ben shahn.<sup>22</sup>

All of this occurred closer to the actual violence than Humphrey's nomination, but television was unable to show the scenes outside the Amphitheatre because of the necessary production delays. Humphrey's nomination was to occur later, but the picture presented by television was much different.

Alioto rose to nominate him (Humphrey); back and forth the cameras swung from Alioto to pudgy, cigar-smoking politicians to Daley, with his undershot, angry jaw, pointing visually without words the nomination of the Warrior of Joy as a puppet of the old machines. Carl Stokes, the black mayor of Cleveland was next-to second Humphrey's nomination-and then, at 9:55, NBC's film of the bloodshed had finally been edited, and Stokes was wiped from the nation's vision to show the violence in living color.<sup>23</sup>

It was a picture created from elements of the truth, which, when combined at the discretion of the director, showed a picture vastly different from what was actually happening.

For, although the peak of the violence had passed by 8:30, the cameras of the nation cut off, as we have seen, by Daley's police and the telephone workers strike from instantaneous television display . . . were emptied, edited,

developed and spread by Telstar across the oceans, by microwave across the country, and by little portable TV sets to the delegates on the floor in the midst of their nomination of a President. This delayed intercutting of the first developed film of bloodshed with the current proceedings on the floor of the convention and Daley's face created the most striking and false political picture of 1968--the nomination of a man for the American Presidency by the brutality and violence of merciless police.<sup>24</sup>

The men that Humphrey had carefully picked to nominate him, men whose background was chosen to enhance Humphrey's image, could not help him because television did not show them to the viewing audience. Time described how "NBC delayed showing Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes' seconding speech for Hubert Humphrey to show a videotaped riot scene that had taken place more than an hour before."<sup>25</sup> The Humphrey staff's response was both predictable and futile.

The Humphrey staff is furious--Stokes is their signature on the Humphrey civil rights commitment; and Stokes' dark face is being wiped from the nation's view to show blood--Hubert Humphrey being nominated in a sea of blood.<sup>26</sup>

Hubert Humphrey was not alone in the unflattering image that television shaped to present to the viewing audience. Because of the strong influence that Dailey was exerting in the convention proceedings and the problems that the networks had encountered with Daley's overzealous security precautions, the networks gave the audience the picture of Dailey controlling everything, from Humphrey's nomination to the schedule of the convention.

. . . the television cameras get what they have been waiting for--a long shot with a zoom lens,

directly on the face of Richard Daley. They have him for a glorious instant of self-caricature, his jaw thrust out, his underlip full, his face furious, his finger giving the slash-signal cutting across his throat, the director's signal to cut and end.<sup>27</sup>

Elements of the picture are true, for Daley did exercise significant control over the workings of the convention and he had enough political power to be very important in the struggle for the nomination, but the television picture emphasized this "boss" image. The networks, however, were not through with Mayor Daley.

TV was to take one final shot at Richard J. Daley. After the violence at the Hilton had died down, Dan Rather, the reporter who had earlier been beaten, cornered Daley for an interview about the situation outside the convention hall. Mayor Daley began an on-camera defense of the police, the city, and the actions that had taken place outside the hall.

And throughout this exchange, Diamond deftly intercut, time and again, between Daley and the scenes from downtown of the National Guard and police . . . the live shots of Daley seemed to lend the videotapes the immediate, compelling quality of live television. And the intercutting was not merely from one visual shot to another in straight sequence, but with the sound of one image being made to provide continuity over and to extend the emphasis to another image-Daley's assurance that everything was well in hand downtown continued as voiceover accompaniment to scenes of bayonet flashing troops and milling police. . . . He had no television set in front of him, and he had no way of knowing just what CBS was at the moment showing about what had happened an hour or so previously. . . . it remained for Diamond to juxtapose Daley's words and the disorders as his sense of irony, drama, or truth saw fit at particular moments.<sup>28</sup>

The editing process is important to the viewer of a political convention because it is this process that determines, from a wide variety of possible images, what the viewer will see. The directors of the coverage are the ones who control his access to information. But even the directors do not have full control over what is being broadcast, because the nature of television coverage exerts its own influence.

Television not only pictures what is happening, but the process of televising an event helps to shape it. Mayor Richard Daley insisted all along that television had encouraged the violence outside the hall simply by reporting it.<sup>29</sup> This was a view that was shared by other, less biased, observers:

But perhaps the most influential contributing factor to the strength of dissent was the existence of communications media of all kinds. There is no question that the protestors in Chicago, as elsewhere, "played to the cameras" or that they often did it very effectively, and, this too had been learned in earlier protests. What "the whole world was watching," after all was not a confrontation but the picture of a confrontation, to some extent directed by a generation that had grown up with television and learned to use it.<sup>30</sup>

No only is television an impetus towards increased activity by protestors, but this type of action is very well suited to the television medium. Television is a medium that is very capable of holding interest by portraying live action. The convention, though live, is a ponderous, continuous process. It is hard for the viewer to understand all of what is happening. Street violence, on the other hand, takes the

form of action and immediate response. The viewer can watch the flow of action, and it will have increased impact because he has "seen" the events. Television is better suited to action than deliberation.

The medium, the filter, was wide open, letting through the maximum amount of information of the confrontation, making it-for the viewer-the most "real" thing that has happened to this point of television coverage of the convention.

. . . "real" in the sense that the medium and the message were so suited to one another that viewers tended not to be reminded of the presence of the filter (TV).<sup>31</sup>

The nature of the television medium is such that it can be made to "involve" the viewer in the images it broadcasts. It can heighten and enhance the emotional response of the viewer by presenting those scenes that are likely to produce the desired response.

The Whole World was indeed watching. But watching through the eyes of film and television. The genius of cinema, its magic control of emotion, comes through the ability it gives its masters to extend the emotion: to freeze on the close-up and expand the impact of anguish or blood to fill an entire screen: or to split and shift camera views to stretch one minute into five by cross-cutting between fragments of film shot at different angles; or to establish visual sequences in such order as the directorial mind conceived as the most emotionally powerful.<sup>32</sup>

Television's ability to elicit emotional responses did not, however, extend to Humphrey's attempt to unite the party (and the nation) with his acceptance speech. Humphrey, who has always epitomized the "politics of joy", was able to move the crowd in the convention center, but his effect on the viewing audience was less discernible.

Fervid, emotional speaking does not communicate well on television, so while Humphrey was quite able to arouse the cheering audience in Chicago's Amphitheatre, his image, communicated to a relaxed, remote-and vastly larger-audience simply failed to convey the excitement or emotion present in the convention hall.<sup>33</sup>

### Effects on the Humphrey Campaign

The foregoing discussion and some of the sources used have suggested that it is within the power of television to affect the viewers' response to and image of a political convention. It has been argued that because of the necessity for editing to produce the most dramatic "show" possible and because of the visual nature of television, which heightens its emotional impact, the act of covering a convention can affect the candidate's chances in the coming election.

It seems necessary, at this point, to evaluate the effect of the coverage of the 1968 convention on the candidacy of Hubert Humphrey. The time that has passed since the event has made it impossible to quantitatively assess the effect of the television coverage. A study done at this late date, no matter how well designed, would have enough built-in inaccuracy to make its data questionable, at best.

The unusual circumstances of 1968, including the rioting outside the convention center and the limited communications access by those attending, suggest that in 1968 television's ability to influence a candidacy would be maximized. While it is not possible to arrive at accurate data concerning attitude change or shifts in voter preference relating to the



convention coverage, it does seem prudent to study judgments made during the convention period and studies that followed the events of the campaign. These can be compared with the campaign conditions that followed during the campaign to see if the probability exists that the 1968 coverage had any effect on Humphrey's campaign.

Theodore White, whose famous narratives about American Presidential campaigns have been published since 1960, suggests two ways in which such coverage could have hurt Humphrey. Television could have presented to the public a negative image that could not be overcome by the election. This was probably the most important way that television had an affect on the Humphrey candidacy. White described this when he said, "Ten minutes later, I find that my notes read, at 8:05, 'The Democrats are finished.' For what happened in those ten minutes, given its dramatic dimension by television, was to be totally unexpungeable from memory."<sup>34</sup> The actions of the police, as they were presented to the public, were something which Humphrey had no means of controlling, but which he still shared the responsibility for.

In democracies, police must be, above all, instruments of policy. One can thus make a strong brief in defense of the conduct of the Chicago police through the first three days of convention violence. . . . But on the dark dawn of Friday the police instruments acted on their own, with no policy or moral authority but their own. For this Hubert Humphrey, Richard J. Daley, and the Cook County machines were to pay the price, as do all in authority under whom the instruments of government go wild.<sup>35</sup>

Just what authority the former Minnesota Senator was presumed to hold over a local police force in Illinois was not made clear, but television's continuous linkage of Humphrey and the Daley machine made such a pairing natural. Brown has also suggested that most Americans placed much of the responsibility on the Humphrey forces.

For most Americans, the vision of Chicago violence was one of breakdown in law and order, and/or the loss of national cohesiveness, and/or the repression of human hope and free expression. Moreover, the conception of violence was paired with the ruling Humphrey wing of the Democratic party.<sup>36</sup>

The implications of this pairing are suggested in a comment made by George H. Bell, Oregon Assistant Secretary of State, to Time magazine. "In time, I may be able to forget the sight of Mayor Daley's cops bludgeoning those kids in Chicago. But I expect to be able to remember it at least until Nov. 5 (election day in 1968)."<sup>37</sup> Mr. Bell, as with almost all of the country, could not vote against Mayor Daley, but he could use his vote against the Democratic nominee.

The second way in which television could have hindered Humphrey's candidacy was to prevent the party from uniting behind the candidate and working for his election. This tendency was noted in a previous discussion relating to the delegates, and it was also observed on a local level following the convention.

Dallas Demos were bemoaning the presidential nomination of Hubert H. Humphrey here Thursday, even

though they voted for him Wednesday night. His candidacy threatens nearly every Democrat running for local office. . . . Additionally, there is a consensus that the atmosphere in this convention city since Monday-rallies, yippies, hippies, fourth party movements, beatings of newsmen, the presence of national guard troops-has created a party image that cannot be overcome by Nov. 5.<sup>38</sup>

The party's image was an image that was spread partly by television, and it was spread not only in the U. S., but throughout the world.

The demonstrators had chanted: "The whole world is watching!" And it was. Newspapers and television commentators from Moscow to Tokyo reacted with revulsion to the orgy of violence in America's Second City. Thanks to Mayor Daley, not only Chicago but the rest of the U. S. as well as was pictured a police state. That impression may be unfair . . . but it will linger long after Daley's reign.<sup>39</sup>

Responses by both of the candidates indicated that they felt that the televised coverage would have an effect on Humphrey's race for the Presidency. Immediately after Wednesday night's convention telecast, Richard Nixon told the UPI that the events would punish Humphrey.

Richard M. Nixon sees the Democratic convention as a boss-run affair with punishing results for Vice President Humphrey and a measurable gain for his own presidential candidacy. . . . the turbulence at the Chicago Convention-disorder that is being witnessed by millions of television viewers-stands in marked and unflattering contrast to the earlier procedures of the Republicans. The Democratic meeting revealed a lack of leadership in that party, while the Republican convention displayed Richard Nixon's ability to unite differing factions.<sup>40</sup>

After the election, Humphrey also believed that television coverage of the convention helped in his defeat:

"We could have won, and we should have won," Humphrey tells old friends who call these days. He will list the reasons for failure--the disaster of television coverage in Chicago, the rift with the McCarthy wing of the Party, the lack of a campaign plan.<sup>41</sup>

Brown described the overall impression that the television coverage of the Democratic convention produced for the viewing audience.

On the floor, at least two conventions had occurred (between the rhetoricians of order [Humphrey] and the rhetoricians of protest [McCarthy]); to the viewers, at least three versions had arisen. For the conservative American, the convention was a frightening breakdown of law and order by forces of the Left; for the moderate American, the convention was proof of a country bereft of a sense of nationality; for the liberal American, the convention was proof of the repression of human hope and of free expression.<sup>42</sup>

None of the images that Brown described is one which would be likely to aid Humphrey in his presidential campaign. He tried to combat the images that television had spread, but he did not succeed.

Hubert Humphrey would struggle against this projected convention all the way to election day; but the results of his effort . . . never quite got together.<sup>43</sup>

### Summary

It seems clear that many people close to the 1968 presidential election, both as participants and observers, were convinced that television coverage of the Chicago convention was an important factor in the Humphrey campaign. While no direct measurement of its importance is possible, the events

that followed the convention suggest that the coverage did hinder Humphrey's political fortunes.

The importance of the convention for the Democratic party and the nation can best be understood by describing its aftermath which lasted at least a month. Humphrey's popularity dropped 10%; the pollsters virtually declared Nixon the winner; the Democratic party floundered in chaos without funds for the campaign; McCarthy supporters refused to support Humphrey and hecklers greeted Humphrey and Muskie at every campaign stop. . . . The polls even suggested that Humphrey, though second in popular vote might run a poor third in the electoral college.<sup>44</sup>

During the rest of the presidential campaign, Hubert Humphrey fought against the effects of his nominating convention. It was a convention that presented the Democrats to the nation in a very bad light. Just how much of this negative impression was due to the nature of television coverage of the event cannot be determined with accuracy, but it seems clear that the act of covering an event such as this convention can affect what the audience learns of it and what impression they form.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1968 (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), p. 326.
- <sup>2</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.
- <sup>3</sup>White, p. 355.
- <sup>4</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.
- <sup>5</sup>White, p. 356.
- <sup>6</sup>William R. Brown, "Television and the Democratic National Convention of 1968," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55, No. 3 (October, 1969), 237.
- <sup>7</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.
- <sup>8</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 68.
- <sup>9</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 68.
- <sup>10</sup>Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968 (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 572.
- <sup>11</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.
- <sup>12</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 68.
- <sup>13</sup>Dan Nimmo, The Political Persuaders (Edgewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 144.
- <sup>14</sup>Reuven Frank, "The Ugly Mirror," Television Quarterly, 8, No. 1 (Winter, 1969), 85.
- <sup>15</sup>Frank, p. 84.
- <sup>16</sup>White, p. 352.
- <sup>17</sup>Thomas Whiteside, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial Process, Chicago," Columbia Journalism Review, 4 (Winter, 1968), 52.
- <sup>18</sup>Whiteside, p. 53.

- <sup>19</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 69.
- <sup>20</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 50.
- <sup>21</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 38.
- <sup>22</sup>Whiteside, p. 43.
- <sup>23</sup>White, p. 375.
- <sup>24</sup>White, p. 373.
- <sup>25</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 48.
- <sup>26</sup>White, p. 376.
- <sup>27</sup>White, pp. 355-6.
- <sup>28</sup>Whiteside, pp. 53-53.
- <sup>29</sup>Newsweek, 9 September 1968, p. 69.
- <sup>30</sup>The Walker Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Rights in Conflict (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 16.
- <sup>31</sup>Brown, p. 244.
- <sup>32</sup>White, pp. 372-3.
- <sup>33</sup>Robert I. Nordvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic National Convention," Today's Speech, 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1970), 37.
- <sup>34</sup>White, p. 371.
- <sup>35</sup>White, p. 383.
- <sup>36</sup>Brown, p. 237.
- <sup>37</sup>Time, 13 September 1968, p. 9.
- <sup>38</sup>Dallas Morning News, 30 August 1968, p. 6A, col. 2.
- <sup>39</sup>Time, 6 September 1968, p. 24.
- <sup>40</sup>Dallas Morning News, 29 August 1968, p. 14A, col. 3.
- <sup>41</sup>White, p. 443.
- <sup>42</sup>Brown, p. 246.

<sup>43</sup>Brown, p. 246.

<sup>44</sup>Bernard L. Brock, "1968 Democratic Campaign: A Political Upheaval," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55, No. 1 (February, 1969), 32.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1968 Democratic Convention was an unusual convention and the coverage produced by the networks was strikingly different from the expected picture. The variability of the image which TV portrays of a convention can be easily perceived when one compares the coverage of the Democratic convention with that of the Republican convention

It is true that part of the difference in coverage can be traced to a difference in circumstances. There were, after all, dramatic and newsworthy events taking place on the streets of Chicago that deserved coverage by the television networks. The rioting that occurred in Chicago did not happen in Miami. The setting in Miami was basically calm and the actions more restrained.

The Republicans also held more subdued convention deliberations. Richard Nixon had worked quietly and skillfully to garner the support he needed before the convention began. There was a challenge to Nixon's candidacy by Nelson Rockefeller, but his chances of wresting the nomination from Nixon were marginal, at best. There was no emotional, polarizing issue in Miami to split the Republicans, like Vietnam split the Democrats. With its candidate virtually pre-ordained,

and no major issues to be deliberated, the Republican Convention was what television made it appear to be--dull and reasonably well-unified.

The Democratic convention had potentially far more drama. There was a major split in the party on the issue of Vietnam. There was heated debate over the platform planks. There were two groups of delegates who were strongly contesting over the choice of a candidate. Much more so than in Miami, the issues were debated in public and the candidates presented a point of view. They took a stand on the major issues, unlike Nixon in Miami, who consistently avoided discussions of Vietnam.

Television could have presented an interesting picture of the Democrats as the party which deliberated over the issues and chose their candidate and his platform openly and in public. But the picture that was presented was one of a boss-run convention nominating its candidate in an orgy of violence that is still vivid to many viewers.

It seems clear from the previous chapters that television did have a hand in shaping the convention and its projected image. This chapter will consider the ways previously discussed in which television affected the convention and its projected image to isolate TV's unique contribution. It will attempt to evaluate television's role in the convention broadcasts and to determine what role, if any, that this coverage played in the outcome of the election. This

chapter will also consider the impact of TV on conventions in general, and also what can or should be done to cope with the problems that this impact poses.

The 1968 Democratic convention is most vividly remembered for the scenes of violence and rioting that accompanied the convention's deliberations. The image that remains is that of one of the most violent and tumultuous events in American politics. This is perhaps the most important role that television coverage played in Chicago--it linked violence with the convention and its candidate.

Media representatives in Chicago were confronted with problems from the very beginning. Then, as they began to hear of the attacks on fellow newsmen, they began to grow angry. Their anger began to color their telecasts. Remarks by Cronkite, Sevaried, Huntley, Brinkley, and others gave the viewers an image of militancy and violence from the beginning of the meeting.

Then, as the street fighting occurred, the networks injected it into the nominating process, almost as if the incidents in the streets served to influence the nomination. There has been no suggestion that Hubert Humphrey was in any real way responsible for the violence or even that it was aimed at him. It was through the editorial choices made by the television men that TV linked those incidents and the Democratic candidate.

The newspapers, news magazines, and other media did not present the same image of Hubert Humphrey being "nominated in a sea of blood." Had the television networks presented the convention in a different light or even had they not broadcast at all, the pairing of Hubert Humphrey and the Chicago violence would have been neither as vivid nor as widespread. Had the networks edited (chosen) in a different fashion (e.g. delaying the footage of the violence until the Humphrey nomination had been completed and separating it, sequentially and visually, from the nomination), the television image of the same events would have been substantially different. The author suggests that the picture presented in this fashion would have been much less damaging to the Democratic nominee. Pairing Humphrey with the events in the streets probably had a negative effect on most segments of Democratic party support. To the liberal elements, it would suggest Humphrey's approval of the suppression of civil liberties; for the conservative, it would suggest the influence of the radical activist (both in the streets and in the McCarthy wing) in the choice of the party's candidate; for the moderate Democrat, it would tie Humphrey to the emotionally loaded issue of crime and violence.

In addition to linking Humphrey with the violence, television linked Humphrey with the "boss" image. There was a certain amount of "boss rule" in the 1968 Democratic convention, but no more so than in the Republican convention.

Because of the networks' anger at the machinations of Mayor Daley, however, the television networks emphasized the tactics of the Daley forces. They also pointedly linked these tactics to Humphrey's nomination. The contrast between the views of the McCarthy nomination with much celebration and Humphrey's being nominated amid intercuts of Alioto to "pudgy, cigar-smoking politicians, to Daley, with his undershot, angry jaw" could not have been accidental. The same celebrative attitude and actions prevailed at Humphrey's nomination, but the picture as presented by TV was significantly different. (Such "joyous" demonstrations are more traditional than substantive, and, in fact, occur at virtually every nomination.) The difference between the pictures was not a difference in the events, but a difference in what TV chose to present.

The previous discussions of the role of television coverage of the 1968 Democratic Convention leave what is perhaps the key question unanswered. What was the effect of this coverage on the outcome of the 1968 Presidential election? Did the broadcast coverage lessen Humphrey's vote-getting appeal?

Again, the question cannot be answered with mathematical certainty. There are no available studies which isolate the television coverage as a factor in voting decisions. Any judgment of this question must rest on inference from the events.

The second factor in evaluating the importance of the TV coverage is the linking of Hubert Humphrey with the violence in the Chicago streets. In an era when street violence was high, the issue became an important one to the American voter. It was both important and emotionally charged. The Gallup Opinion Index reported that "the evidence suggests that the problems of crime and lawlessness--and particularly disorders in the cities and on the campus--are now the most emotionally charged of all issues."<sup>1</sup> The linkage by television of Humphrey with the street violence could only have had a negative effect on his candidacy.

An analysis of the voter preferences as developed by the Gallup Poll also suggests the negative impact of the convention coverage on the Humphrey race.<sup>2</sup> There is a general tendency for a candidate's approval rating to rise immediately adjacent to his nomination. Not only did this tendency fail to operate for Humphrey, his approval rating fell markedly. Nixon's approval rating rose from 35 per cent in early July to 40 per cent in mid-July to a high of 45 per cent in late August following his nomination. Humphrey, by contrast, lost only two percentage points (40 per cent to 38 per cent) from early July to mid-July, but lost a full nine percentage points (38 per cent to 29 per cent) from mid-July to late August, following his nomination.

Humphrey was able to overcome much of this loss by election day. He rose from 28 per cent in mid-September

following his nomination to 40 per cent on November 4, the day before the election; but he was never able to regain his peak of 42 per cent held in June of 1968. It is clear that the Humphrey campaign got off to a bad start following the convention, and it is reasonable to assume that the adverse coverage was a factor.

No percentage loss of votes can be applied to this coverage, but in an election as close as that of 1968, it is not unreasonable to assume that television, by its coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention, played a role in the selection of a President.

Television played a variety of roles in the functioning of the convention, but its role in supporting and spreading the Kennedy candidacy was the most important. Observers such as Whiteside and White have stressed that by the time television began presenting the Kennedy "story" it was already over. Nonetheless, the networks had found a dramatic story and they covered it with such persistence that they helped to create the "Kennedy boom" that they were covering. Had the networks not presented it in that fashion, it seems likely that the story would have died from its own lack of substance.

It was, again, the choices that the television men made that affected the story. The idea of Ted Kennedy picking up the fallen Kennedy standard was a very dramatic and compelling one. It was only natural that the networks would highlight it. It is even probable that the networks did not

realize what effect their search for drama was having; but it does seem likely that television coverage of limited Kennedy support played a major role in expanding and solidifying that support.

From the analysis of the specific role of television coverage of the 1968 conventions, some general conclusions about the impact of television on political conventions can be drawn.

Perhaps the most basic change in the convention process brought about by television has been the change in the focus of the political convention. Initially, the convention served as a meeting among chosen delegates to consider and select a candidate. The expansion of the communications media has changed this role. Prior to the convention, there is an exhaustive series of primary elections in different states which serve to both develop delegate strength and to demonstrate the relative strengths of the candidates. The media have enabled the public and the attending delegates to view these primary campaigns firsthand, and to evaluate the candidates before the convention. Thus, an important element in the nominating process has taken place before the actual assembly of the delegates. In addition, some delegates are committed through political maneuvering and selective appointments. When the convention begins, there are very few uncommitted delegates. The nominating decision has been made before and brought to the convention. The convention then



serves to ratify this decision and to promote the candidate to the public.

The communications media have played a large role in this change. The party cannot afford to have a highly contested nomination campaign because it projects an image of disunity and helps to alienate party members. If, as this paper has argued, the convention has become part of the election campaign, the party must present the most flattering picture it can of the party and its candidate.

The obvious question that arises is: "What happened to the Democrats in 1968?" Even though the nomination was well in hand for Humphrey and the political professionals were in complete control of the convention, the television picture of the convention was hardly flattering. It seems to the author that the Democrats simply did not realize the power of television to shape the public's view of their meeting. They made a few ineffectual gestures (such as scheduling and convention seating arrangements) toward controlling the coverage, but they imposed no real restrictions on what the networks broadcast. There are, of course, some very real and important questions that arise with regard to attempts by politicians to control news broadcasts. These will be considered along with possible solutions later in this chapter.

The result is that the politicians in control of the political parties have begun to realize the importance of television coverage of the party's activities. The

politicians have begun to learn that it is not necessarily what is happening, but what the public sees happening, that is important to their campaign.

The managers of the Convention have not yet learned well enough to realize what it means that television is there. . . . It may be said that there were conventions in the past which were even more rigidly managed. But not when people could watch it happening, feel that it was they being managed.)

Another aspect of television coverage of nominating conventions that must be considered is the information function of television for the delegates. The delegates depend upon the media for information about the convention and outside events. While this function was exaggerated in 1968 because of the telephone strike, it seems to be a general function rather than one occurring just in 1968.

The ability of the media to spread and solidify rumors suggests that the networks need to take extra care in tracking down sources and verifying rumors. While the reporters argue that they exercise caution, the events of 1968, especially the Kennedy "candidacy", indicate that sufficient care is not always exercised. The author, unfortunately, cannot suggest a foolproof system of determining the validity of rumors, but it would at least be beneficial if the networks would make a concerted effort to check out such rumors, rather than rushing them on the air to "scoop" the competition.

Perhaps the greatest impact on a political convention is the image of the convention and the party that television

projects. This is a major concern to party leaders because television has the power to shape that image.

The basis of TV's ability to do this lies in the television editing process. The necessity to provide the audience with a dramatic program, coupled with the visual nature of television, causes the media representatives to select films and tapes for their effect and their drama. It is certainly a natural tendency for the television people to make the coverage as exciting as possible. But television coverage of a political convention is not a television "show"; it is an attempt to bring the political process to the public. In 1968, the picture that the viewers got was not a picture of what was going on in the convention; it was a montage of events, sometimes related, sometimes not, that, once combined, could not be easily separated into its component parts by the viewer.

Television's editing procedures in Chicago appeared to be influenced by the mood of the media men. The commentators seemed to lose some of that journalistic "objectivity" on which they pride themselves. Many of the on-camera comments clearly conveyed the newsmen's anger, and it appears to the author that their anger colored both their commentary and their editing decisions. Whiteside, after viewing the editing process in Chicago, suggests that the networks must exercise real care to avoid having those decisions affect the balance of their coverage:

It seems to me that this kind of intercutting is a very risky practice. . . . But I think that as time goes on this kind of instantaneous montage . . . is likely to loom very large in the television process. . . . It seems to me quite likely that television will bring forth, sooner or later, a man so skilled at manipulating and juxtaposing, in strong individual style, innumerable fragments of visual and aural reality into a sequential mosaic that he will carry forward the present state of instantaneous electronic image montage to an altogether new level. It will be an extraordinarily compelling and dangerous journalistic art form.<sup>4</sup>

Whiteside specifically mentioned the practice of intercutting live shots and taped shots, as was done in CBS's Daley interview, as an area that requires extra care. He does conclude that in this instance, Diamond was justified in trying to present an overall picture of what had happened. The author, however, suggests that this would have been justified only if Mayor Daley had had access to a monitor so that he could respond to the scenes being shown. The interview, as broadcast, enabled Diamond to choose between what was live and what had happened an hour ago, without on-screen identification, and without the opportunity for Daley to document the provocation of the police by demonstrators. The author can only conclude that Mr. Diamond was overzealous at best.

One method of limiting the television network's ability to affect the picture of the events it is covering would be for the political parties to limit the scope of television coverage of the conventions. The political party is a major

benefactor of continued coverage, so it is neither likely or desirable for them to prevent such coverage.

The limitation which would seem to strike the best balance between continuing to allow the networks the leeway they have at present and placing severe restrictions on TV coverage is to allow only pool coverage of the conventions. This is a common practice in American politics, being used many times for Presidential speeches and other governmental functions.

While it is clear that such a restriction would limit the networks' creativity, it would also eliminate much of the competitive nature of convention broadcasting. The scenes broadcast would be the same for all networks, but the commentary provided by the anchormen would be unrestricted. Thus, the networks would retain their ability to analyze, comment, and describe the proceedings in the manner they desired, but their ability to shape different stories from fragments of events and interviews would be limited. This system is not a new one; it has proven both its value and its feasibility in numerous applications. It would, of course, restrict the currently held freedom of the networks, but it would also impose a responsibility on them that they have sometimes not assumed.

There are a number of questions that might arise regarding the public's "right to know." Does the public have the right to see unrestricted coverage of a political

convention? A strong case can be made for the public's right to unrestricted access to public events and governmental functions.

Do the networks have the right, exclusive of the party's wishes, to cover such events as they see fit? Is that part of "freedom of speech?" The answer, it seems to this author, is no. The parties would be quite within their power to prevent the coverage altogether. If this were the case, then they could also set conditions under which the coverage would be allowed. The networks would also retain a degree of control, because they could refuse to broadcast under those conditions if they deemed them intolerable. But from the standpoint of 1968, the Democrats would probably have been better off if there had been no TV coverage.

It also seems likely that Congress could not exercise any control over the convention coverage. There is no clear authority for Congress to either require open coverage or to legislate restrictions.

In the end, it becomes a question of priorities. The public's access to information would not be severely limited by the advent of pool coverage. What would be limited is the networks' ability to manipulate their medium, to use their skills. This must be weighed against the party's desire to retain a degree of control over its projected portrait. In arguing for the imposition of reforms, including specifically the use of pool coverage, Theodore White has pointed out the

necessity for restricting television's control of the environment of communications:

In the case of both parties, an extension, perhaps, of their sessions (is needed) to permit deliberations as required by issues, not as required by the media; and, above all, some control of the environment of communications. To permit American conventions to become, as they have become, a quarry for dramatic fragments by competitive television networks is to let camera values control the atmosphere of politics.<sup>5</sup>

The negative aspects of network coverage of the 1968 Democratic convention seemed to be related to the competitive nature of such telecasting. The necessity for providing drama for the television viewer required editing designed to produce drama. To impose pool coverage would significantly reduce the competitive aspects of such news coverage, and hopefully, be a major step toward eliminating some of the excesses that afflicted the Democratic Party in 1968.

It seems clear that the communication of events by the television networks had a definite impact on the television viewers. The image produced in the voter's mind of a convention proceeding amid violence and strife was followed by a drop in the Democrat's voter support and campaign contributions. It also seems clear that television had a hand in producing this impact through the manner in which the networks communicated what was happening. In 1968, television coverage of the Democratic convention helped to shape not only the event, but also the public response to that event,

and is therefore an interesting example of how the communication process can affect events and their results.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gallup Opinion Index, No. 40, October, 1968 (Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>The figures that follow are derived from polls taken throughout the election year and listed in Gallup Opinion Index (Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Reuven Frank, "The Ugly Mirror," Television Quarterly, 8, No. 1 (Winter, 1969), 89.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Whiteside, "Corridor of Mirrors: The Television Editorial Process, Chicago," Columbia Journalism Review, 4 (Winter, 1968), 54.

<sup>5</sup>Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1968 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 388.

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