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How Not to Select Presidential Candidates: A View from Europe

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4 DAYS ONLY!

All over Europe in the autumn of 1980, wherever people met to talk politics, there was only one topic of conversation: How on earth had a great country like the United States, filled with talented men and women, managed to land itself with two such second- (or was it third-?) rate presidential candidates as Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan?

Europe's political leaders had, of course, to be circumspect in what they said publicly; but the press had no such inhibitions. Newspapers like *Le Monde* of Paris and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* were tepid in their response to the two candidates. Leading British newspapers were more outspoken:

> In Europe, there is great bewilderment that the Americans should be landing themselves with a choice between two such mediocre figures. (*Financial Times*)
>
> It is no wonder that Americans feel that there has been some malfunction of their political system. The President talks perfectly good sense, but his reasonable words and good intentions are somehow converted into unsuccessful policies. Governor Reagan does not sound sensible at all. (*The Times*)
>
> In short, neither of the two main candidates gives much impression of knowing how they want to lead America in the complicated and difficult years ahead. . . . One sighs for a man of stature. (*Daily Telegraph*)[1]

[1] For typical articles in *Le Monde* and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, see "Un lourd processus," *Le Monde*, November 5, 1980, and "Jimmy Carter trotz allem," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, August 18, 1980. The three quotations from British newspapers are from, respectively, "A Hard Choice for the U.S.," *Financial Times*, July 31, 1980; "A Great and Noble Campaign," *The Times* (London), September 3, 1980; and "Presidential Antics," *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1980.

Asked to develop their views of the two men in more detail, the great majority of European politicians and public officials would probably have responded roughly like this:

> Carter? A nice enough chap in his way. Certainly well-meaning, undoubtedly intelligent—but, as we all know, hopelessly inept. Raises issues, claims to attach great importance to them, then unexpectedly drops them, often with the result that friends and allies are left out on a limb. No consistent goals or policies; no follow-through. Treats everything on a case-by-case basis: cannot seem to see that in politics everything is interconnected. A curious tendency to moralize everything: whoever heard of a *moral* energy policy!? Came to Washington knowing little about American national politics, or about NATO, or about Europe; after nearly four years, has seemingly learned almost nothing. Surrounds himself with people who are as ignorant of the world as he is. In short, a decent man but hopelessly out of his depth.
>
> Reagan? Probably no better than Carter, possibly a good deal worse. Like Carter, a man with no real experience of national-level politics; like Carter, too, a man with no previous experience of foreign affairs. An accomplished platform performer, but apparently without any real grasp of the complexity of economic and foreign-affairs issues. Evidently not very bright: seems actually to believe his simple-minded slogans! Said to be lazy. To be sure, a tolerable governor of California, but then that was hardly a difficult post to fill with the state's economy growing as fast as it then was. Most that can be hoped for: that Reagan would choose able people, then delegate a good deal of authority to them. In short, possibly a disaster, at best a sort of down-market Eisenhower.[2]

Such views may have been unfair; they may have been ill informed. But they were certainly widely—indeed almost universally—held in Europe in 1980. This chapter seeks to explain how two men who probably could not have been selected in any European country could become their parties' presidential nominees in the United States, and at the same time to point up certain contrasts between European methods of selecting party leaders and the methods currently being employed in America. Before we proceed, however, it is worth making

[2] These are not real quotations but a sort of montage of the views of European politicians, journalists, and businessmen. It is doubtful whether any large number of informed Europeans would have dissented from them.

the point that the views just expressed of Carter and Reagan were not confined to skeptical, world-weary Europeans; they were widely held in the United States itself.

American Views of Carter and Reagan

The available evidence suggests that the two main presidential candidates in 1980 were less well thought of by the American people than any other pair of candidates since at least the 1930s. To a remarkable degree, the year's political jokes were aimed not at Carter or Reagan separately but at the two together. A bumper sticker to be seen in the streets of New York read: "Your candidate is even worse than my candidate." The *Cincinnati Enquirer* published a cartoon showing a campaign committee room with two entrances. The sign outside one read, "Anybody but Carter Hdqtrs," the sign outside the other, "Anybody but Reagan Hdqtrs." The committee room was manned by John Anderson. The cover of *Public Opinion* magazine in June/July 1980 depicted a man wearing four campaign buttons on his lapel. The first three were for Carter, Reagan, and Anderson; the fourth said, "No thanks."[3]

Likewise, the views of newspapers and magazines in America were very similar to those of the European press. "The present prospects are dismaying," the *New York Times* commented in July. The *Washington Post* remarked somewhat later in the campaign:

> There is no way, given the nature of the two prime contenders for the office, that this country is going to elect a president in November who is especially gifted in or suited to the conduct of the office. And that is that.

On the eve of election day itself, *Time* magazine began its concluding story on the campaign:

> For more than a year, two flawed candidates have been floundering toward the final showdown, each unable to give any but his most unquestioning supporters much reason to vote for him except dislike of his opponent.

A survey of more than 1,600 American daily newspapers found that, whereas in 1976 only 168 had refused to endorse any candidate, in 1980 fully 439 insisted on remaining neutral.[4]

[3] The New York bumper sticker was seen by the present writer. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* cartoon was reprinted in *Public Opinion*, June/July 1980, p. 25. The man with the lapel buttons appeared on the cover of the same issue of *Public Opinion*.
[4] The survey was reported in *Newsweek*, November 10, 1980, p. 39. The other quotations are taken from "It's Still 'None of the Above,'" *New York Times*,

TABLE 9–1

VOTERS GIVING "HIGHLY FAVORABLE" RATING TO MAJOR-PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, 1952–1980

	Percentage of Voters Giving Rating		
	Republican candidate	Democratic candidate	Total
1952	47	37	84
1956	59	33	92
1960	40	42	82
1964	16	49	65
1968	38	25	63
1972	41	21	62
1976	28	41	69
1980	23	30	53

SOURCE: Gallup Poll, *New York Times*, October 31, 1980.

The most important views, however, were the views of the American people themselves. Beginning in 1952, the Gallup poll has asked a sample of voters every four years to rate each of the presidential candidates on a ten-point scale ranging from very favorable to very unfavorable. If the two highest points on each candidate's scale (+5 and +4) are merged to form a single "highly favorable" rating, then the results for the last eight presidential elections are as shown in table 9–1. Carter individually, it appears, was not as unpopular as Hubert Humphrey in 1968 or George McGovern in 1972; similarly, Reagan individually was not as unpopular as Barry Goldwater in 1964. Taken together, however, the two 1980 candidates were given a "highly favorable" rating by fewer voters than in any of the previous seven Gallup surveys. To take the extreme cases, in 1956, 92 percent of the electorate thought highly of either Dwight Eisenhower or Adlai Stevenson, whereas in 1980 the proportion of voters holding Carter and Reagan in equally high esteem was a mere 53 percent. America's citizens manifested their lack of enthusiasm by

reprinted in *International Herald Tribune*, August 1, 1980; "Using Presidential Power," *Washington Post*, October 20, 1980; and "Battling Down the Stretch," *Time*, November 3, 1980 p. 18.

turning out to vote on November 4 in smaller numbers than at any presidential election since 1948.[5]

In the rest of this chapter, we shall assume for the sake of argument that the instincts of the American people were right—that, compared with the other talent available, Carter and Reagan were (and are) pretty unimpressive political leaders. Such an assumption will clearly not please the minority of ardent Carter and Reagan enthusiasts; but even they may accept that there is some validity in the analysis that follows.

A European Contrast

No system of selecting political leaders can guarantee success. The ancient Athenians chose Pericles but also Alcibiades; the system that resulted in the nomination of Abraham Lincoln was essentially the same system that produced James Buchanan. All that a procedure for choosing leaders can do is make it more or less probable that men and women with certain characteristics, abilities, and aptitudes will emerge. America's presidential candidates in recent years have not, most people now believe, been altogether satisfactory. There may be a connection between this fact and the way in which presidential candidates are currently nominated.

One way of appreciating the peculiar features of America's way of selecting candidates for the country's highest office is to compare it with what happens in other countries. Britain provides an especially useful comparison, partly because it is better documented than most of the others but chiefly because it would be hard to imagine a system more unlike that of the United States; in most respects, as will become clear, the American and British systems are polar opposites. The British system is, moreover, not unusual. Party leaders in Australia, New Zealand, and Japan are selected in much the same way as in Britain, and the leadership-selection systems in most Western European countries certainly resemble the British system more closely than the American.[6]

[5] The lowest previous turnout since 1932 was 51.5 percent in 1948. From 1920 to 1932 turnouts in presidential elections ranged from 44.2 percent (1920) to 52.9 (1932). In 1936 turnout rose to 57.5 percent and, except for 1948, has stayed above 54.0 percent until the 1980 election. For a brief discussion, see Richard A. Watson, *The Presidential Contest* (New York: John Wiley, 1980), chap. 4.

[6] Unfortunately, no general comparative study of this subject exists; but see L. F. Crisp, *Australian National Government* (Melbourne: Longmans, 1974); Stephen Levine, *Politics in New Zealand* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1978); Robert E. Ward, Japan's Political System, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978); and Anthony King, "Executives," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Governmental Institutions and Processes*, vol. 5, *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 183-94.

At the time in 1980 when the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees were being chosen in the United States, the leaders of Britain's two largest parties, the Conservatives and Labour, were Margaret Thatcher and James Callaghan. The reader is asked to consider the process by which these two people rose to the leadership of their respective parties. (Both also became prime minister either immediately or later; but it is the process of *selecting* party leaders rather than of *electing* prime ministers that we are concerned with here.)[7]

Margaret Thatcher, a tax lawyer, fought her first parliamentary election in 1950 at the age of twenty-four. She finally entered the House of Commons nine years later at the age of thirty-four. After serving on the Conservative back benches for two years, she was promoted to junior ministerial office in 1961 at the age of thirty-six. She held the office of parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance until the Conservative party was defeated at the general election of 1964. For the next six years, while the Conservatives were in opposition, she spoke for her party in the House of Commons on housing, pensions, transport, energy, economic affairs, and, latterly, education. Edward Heath, then the Conservative leader, appointed her to his "shadow cabinet" in 1967. When the Conservatives were returned to power in 1970, she entered the real cabinet as secretary of state for education and science, a post she held until the Conservatives were again defeated in February 1974. In the new Parliament, she was first chief Conservative spokesman on housing and local government matters, then her party's shadow chancellor of the exchequer (that is, chief spokesman on economic and financial affairs).

By this time, Edward Heath's political star was sinking fast. The Conservatives had lost three of the four general elections that it had fought under his leadership, and the 1970–1974 Heath government was generally considered a failure. In October 1974 Margaret Thatcher decided to stand against him for the leadership. The election took place some four months later, in the first half of February 1975. All of the candidates were Conservative members of the House of Commons; so were all of the electors. No one outside the House of Commons participated in the election, except as observers. The various candidates' "campaigns," if that is the right

[7] The ensuing account of how Thatcher and Callaghan were selected is largely drawn from Anthony King, "Politics, Economics, and the Trade Unions, 1974-1979," in Howard R. Penniman, ed., *Britain at the Polls, 1979: A Study of the General Election* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), and also from the sources listed there.

word, consisted solely of canvassing and lobbying their fellow members of Parliament (MPs). Thatcher led on the first ballot, but not by quite enough to secure her election outright; on the second ballot, a week later, she won easily. The views of the mass public appear to have played little, if any, part in determining the outcome; opinion polls in 1975 indicated that at least two other prominent Conservatives were more highly regarded than Thatcher. Nevertheless, in becoming Conservative leader, she became automatically her party's candidate for prime minister.

James Callaghan, a minor trade union official, was elected to Parliament at his first attempt in 1945. He was then thirty-three, having served in the navy during the war. In the postwar Labour government, he served in two junior offices, first as parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Transport, later as parliamentary and financial secretary to the Admiralty (a less important office than it sounds). Labour was defeated in 1951 and spent the next thirteen years in opposition. During this time, Callaghan became a member of the shadow cabinet and gradually a more and more prominent figure in his party; he served both as shadow colonial secretary and as shadow chancellor. When Labour finally returned to power in 1964, he became chancellor of the exchequer, remaining at the Treasury for three years before becoming home secretary in a sideways move in 1967. He was again a member of the shadow cabinet between 1970 and 1974, speaking mainly on foreign affairs; and when Labour was again elected in February 1974, Callaghan became foreign secretary and chief British negotiator with the European Community.

By 1976 Callaghan had probably abandoned his previous ambition of becoming his party's leader and prime minister; but in March 1976 the incumbent prime minister, Harold Wilson, suddenly resigned. Under Labour's rules, a new leader of the party had to be elected immediately. Callaghan stood, together with five other candidates. As in the case of the Conservative party, all of the candidates were MPs; so were all of the electors. Wilson resigned on March 16. The first ballot was held on March 22, the second on March 29, the third on April 5. Callaghan was runner-up on the first ballot but established a commanding lead on the second and finally won on the third. Unlike Thatcher, Callaghan was the most popular of the various contenders so far as the mass electorate was concerned. On becoming Labour leader, since his party was in power at the time, he immediately took over as prime minister.

Eight points need to be made about the British leadership-

selection process, if it is to be compared with the American. Several of them have been hinted at already.

1. *The winners had entered politics at an early age and had served for a considerable number of years in Parliament before becoming their party's leader.* Not only had Thatcher been an MP for sixteen years and Callaghan for thirty-one, but also most of their rivals had been around for just as long, in some cases even longer. William Whitelaw, Thatcher's main rival, was first elected to Parliament in 1955; Michael Foot, who finished second to Callaghan, was first elected to the House at the same time as Callaghan, in 1945.

2. *The winners had served in a number of different national-level offices.* Thatcher was somewhat unusual in having been a minister in only two departments (Pensions and National Insurance, and Education), but she had spoken for her party on a wide variety of other subjects. Callaghan was also unusual but in the opposite direction: he is the only prime minister in British history to have previously held all of the other principal offices of state: chancellor of the exchequer, home secretary, and foreign secretary. Most of the other contenders in 1975 and 1976 were at least as experienced as Thatcher, several of them more so.

3. *The candidates were assessed and voted upon exclusively by their fellow politicians.* All of the voters in the two leadership elections had had an opportunity to observe the various contenders at first hand—on the floor of the House of Commons, in committee, in party meetings, in some cases around the cabinet table. Most of them were on first-name terms with the people they were voting for; they were in an excellent position to know their strengths and weaknesses. More than that, they had a powerful incentive to arrive at the right decision since they personally would have to live with the consequences. They would have to work in the House of Commons with the new leader; if they made the wrong decision, they would suffer electorally and possibly also in career terms.[8]

4. *The leadership campaigns were very short.* In one sense, cam-

[8] It should perhaps be explained for the benefit of American readers that voting in Britain since well before World War II has largely been party voting. That is, voters have been far more concerned with which party nationally would make the better government than with the personalities and voting records of their individual local candidates. It follows that members of Parliament deciding how to vote in 1975 and 1976 had to consider what effect any given leadership candidate would have on the party's chances nationally and therefore on their own chances locally. Furthermore, whether the party won nationally would determine whether or not they had any chance of becoming government ministers. In short, their personal stakes were high—far higher than, say, the stakes of voters in primary elections in the United States.

paigns for the leadership of Britain's major parties are never-ending, since ambitious politicians, from the moment they first set foot in the House of Commons, are trying to establish their reputations, to have themselves noticed by their parliamentary colleagues; but the time taken for an actual leadership election is highly telescoped. Thatcher declared her candidacy in October 1974; the result was known by mid-February 1975, only twelve weeks later. The Labour contest lasted less than three weeks.

5. *The leadership campaigns involved very little wear and tear on the part of the candidates and their families.* Indeed the very term "campaign," as has already been suggested, is something of a misnomer. Public rallies and national tours have played no part in the election of British party leaders; even television appearances have mattered only insofar as they have influenced the occasional wavering MP. The arena in which the election has historically been fought has been almost entirely the House of Commons. In the weeks between October 1974 and February 1975, Thatcher probably accepted rather more speaking engagements in the country than she would have done otherwise; she undoubtedly appeared more often on television—though always being interviewed or addressing public meetings, never speaking straight-to-camera or trying to sell herself in "Thatcher commercials" (of which there were, and could be, none).[9] The only significant difference that the election probably made to Thatcher's life—apart from the emotional strains inherent in the occasion—was a much increased media interest in her comings and goings. Photographers congregated outside her house; she and other members of her family were pestered for interviews. The interest of the press and television was increased by the fact that she was the first woman to be a serious contender for the leadership of either major party. Nevertheless, her life was not radically disrupted by the contest, except possibly during the last few days, and the House of Commons remained her main base of operations. In the case of Labour, the leadership contest made even less difference to the contenders. With Labour in power, all six candidates were already senior cabinet ministers. They all had big jobs to do; they were already in the public eye; they actually had to meet together several times a week to discuss government business. To be sure, they were photographed

[9] There could be none because in Britain candidates for office are not permitted to buy time on television or radio to advertise themselves. At general elections, political parties are allotted a certain amount of free time; but this was not a general election. Even if the candidates had been able to buy time, it is doubtful whether they would have done so: a television spot seen by millions of people is not the most efficient way to reach some 250-300 people, whom one is anyway in a position to see almost every day.

rather more often than usual; they were the subject of minibiographies on television; their wives were endlessly rung up by women's magazines. But that was about it.

6. *The leadership campaigns cost next to nothing*—largely for the reasons just given. Thatcher and her supporters undoubtedly had to do a certain amount of entertaining of their fellow MPs, and they must have run up considerable telephone and taxi bills. In the Labour party, entertaining has less part to play, but the telephone and taxi bills were probably about the same. At a guess, the Conservative leadership contest cost all of those involved a total of about £2,500—say, $6,000. It is doubtful whether the total cost of the Labour contest, to both the party and all of the participants, was more than £1,000—call it $2,500. Certainly there was no need to raise funds, and there were therefore neither fund raisers nor campaign contributors.

7. *The process of electing the leader in each case was entirely a party process.* The rules governing the internal affairs of political parties in Britain are, in effect, like the rules of a private club. Legislatures and courts neither determine what they should contain nor (except in very rare cases) decide how they should be applied. Thatcher was chosen by members of the Conservative party, Callaghan by members of the Labour party. The mass public played no part in the two contests; neither, except very marginally and indirectly, did television and the press. The parties made the decisions; outsiders merely watched.

8. *Electoral considerations did not loom large in the minds of most MPs as they decided how to cast their ballots.* Somewhat surprisingly, since the personality of the party leader is likely to have at least some bearing on how well the party does at the next general election, the evidence suggests that most MPs, in deciding whom to vote for, are not overly influenced by electoral considerations—or at least by opinion-poll findings. Thatcher was not the most popular Conservative in the country in 1975, but she won. Callaghan was the most popular Labour figure in the eyes of the electorate a year later, but it took him three ballots to defeat the much less popular Michael Foot. MPs appear to be chiefly influenced by considerations of policy and ideology and, probably to a lesser extent, by which of the contenders they think will make the better prime minister. This is a subtle, little-researched point, and there is no need to go into greater detail here.[10]

[10] British MPs, wisely or unwisely, behave as though they believe either that ideological and policy considerations are more important than electoral ones or

So much for how the people who led Britain's two major political parties in the summer of 1980 were originally selected. Now contrast the processes just described with the processes that resulted in Jimmy Carter's and Ronald Reagan's becoming the presidential nominees of the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States. To do so is to enter a different world.[11]

Carter, a small-town businessman and former naval officer, first ran for the governorship of Georgia in 1966. He was then forty-two and had already served two terms in the Georgia state senate. His first attempt at the governorship failed, but he then spent the whole of the next four years campaigning around the state, and in 1970 his efforts were rewarded; he won a runoff election by a handsome margin, defeating a previously popular incumbent. Although he lacked any experience of national politics and government, Carter's eyes were already on the presidency, and in 1972, halfway through the one term that Georgia's state constitution allowed him as governor, he and his advisers decided that he should make a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1976. George McGovern had proved an appallingly bad candidate in 1972, and the race for the 1976 nomination looked as though it were going to be wide open. In order to make himself better known nationally, Carter volunteered to serve as the Democrats' campaign coordinator for the 1974 midterm congressional elections. He announced his presidential candidacy in December of that year.

For the next eighteen months, the ex-governor of Georgia campaigned full time for his party's nomination. He began by dispatching 500,000 letters to potential campaign contributors. In the course of 1975, he traveled from coast to coast, spending time in forty-six states and the District of Columbia. To win the nomination, he needed, in some states, the support of state and local party leaders; but his main appeal had to be to the millions of ordinary citizens

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that whomever they elect can be counted on, as the result of increased television exposure and such like, to become an acceptable national figure. Alternatively, they may be misinformed about opinion-poll findings or may simply not believe them. The point is discussed briefly at various points in King, "Politics, Economics, and the Trade Unions."

[11] The ensuing account of the nominations of Carter and Reagan is based largely on Martin Schram, *Running for President: A Journal of the Carter Campaign* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977); James Wooten, *Dasher: The Roots and Rising of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Warner Books, 1979); Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972-1976* (New York: Viking, 1977); Hedrick Smith et al., *Reagan: The Man, the President* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); and Richard Harwood, ed., *The Pursuit of the Presidency 1980* (New York: Berkley Books, 1980).

eligible to vote in the twenty-nine primary elections due to be held in 1976. The primaries would choose or bind nearly 75 percent of the 3,008 delegates to the Democratic National Convention in July. In the end, Carter's name appeared on the ballot in twenty-six states, and he campaigned actively in most of them. Altogether some 15.6 million people turned out to vote in the Democratic primaries; 6.3 million of them voted for Carter. He won the first primary in New Hampshire in February and had the nomination effectively sewn up by the beginning of June. His victory in the primaries and the state caucuses was ratified on the first ballot at the party's nominating convention in New York City. Democratic senators, congressmen, and governors played little part in the selection process—beyond, in most cases, casting their own primary ballots. In 1980, although he was president, Carter was forced to campaign again for the Democratic nomination.

Ronald Reagan, a retired film actor and professional after-dinner speaker, fought his first election in 1966 when he was already fifty-five years old. He was elected governor of California at this first attempt and was reelected to a second four-year term in 1970. He had had a certain amount of previous political experience, raising money and speaking for Barry Goldwater during the latter's ill-fated presidential campaign in 1964. Although, like Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan lacked firsthand experience of national government, Reagan's thoughts, like Carter's, soon turned toward the White House. He sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1968, though in that year he did little campaigning on his own behalf. Matters were quite different when it came to the 1976 nomination. By this time Reagan, no longer governor of California, was free to devote his whole time to his drive for the presidency—a circumstance that gave him a considerable advantage over the incumbent president, Gerald Ford. Reagan announced his candidacy in the summer of 1975 and, with the aid of crossover votes from conservative Democrats and independents, fared well in the Republican primaries in the following year, winning 50.7 percent of the vote to Ford's 49.3 percent. Ford, however, had a slight edge among delegates to the Kansas City convention and was able to win the nomination on the first ballot.

By the summer of 1976, Ronald Reagan had been working toward the presidency for nearly eight years—only part time between 1968 and 1975 but virtually full time in the months since then. For the next four years, throughout the lifetime of Jimmy Carter's presidency, he went on working. He visited nearly every state in the union, taping radio commentaries, giving thousands of speeches, shaking thousands of hands, traversing hundreds of thousands of miles. When

in November 1979 he formally announced that he intended to run, he already had the support of most Republican leaders in states where such support counted; but his main objective, like Carter's four years before, was the amassing of votes in primary elections. As it turned out, Reagan's path was even smoother than Carter's in 1976 (and far smoother than Carter's in 1980). He drubbed his chief rival, George Bush, in New Hampshire in February and by the time of the Michigan primary in May had won enough delegates to secure the nomination. Of the 12.8 million votes cast in the Republican primaries, Reagan won 7.6 million (60 percent). In the Republican party, as in the Democratic, public officeholders played no formal role—and very little actual role—in the contest. When Reagan was finally acclaimed at his party's convention in Detroit in July 1980, he was sixty-nine years old. He had been campaigning for the presidency for the better part of a dozen years.

These events in the United States can easily be compared, point by point, with the events surrounding the selection of Margaret Thatcher and James Callaghan as party leaders on the other side of the Atlantic.

1. *The two winners in the United States had entered politics in middle age, and neither had very much experience of government.* Carter first ran for statewide office at the age of forty-two, Reagan at the age of fifty-five. By contrast, Thatcher first stood for Parliament when she was only twenty-four, Callaghan when he was thirty-three. At the time he won the Democratic nomination, Carter had spent four years in the Georgia state legislature and another four years as the state's governor; Reagan had spent eight years as California's governor in Sacramento. These two stints of eight years compare with Margaret Thatcher's sixteen years in the British House of Commons and James Callaghan's thirty-one.

2. *Neither winner in the United States had ever served in any capacity in the national government, whether in Washington or overseas. Moreover, at the time of their nomination neither held any public office whatsoever.* Indeed it is scarcely too strong to say that America's presidential nominees were drawn from the ranks of the unemployed. This was not true of all of the contenders for the two major parties' nominations in 1976 and 1980. Apart from the incumbent presidents in both years, in 1976 Democrats Henry Jackson (Washington) and Frank Church (Idaho) were both long-serving U.S. senators, and Democrat Morris Udall (Arizona) was a prominent member of the House of Representatives. Carter's chief rival in 1980, Edward Kennedy (Massachusetts), was also a U.S. senator.

Among the Republicans in 1980, Howard Baker (Tennessee) was the Senate minority leader, and John Connally had served in the federal executive branch as secretary of the navy under John Kennedy and secretary of the treasury under Richard Nixon. George Bush had had the most varied experience, having served two terms in the House of Representatives and subsequently as ambassador to the United Nations, chief of the U.S. liaison office in Peking, and director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Bush, however, lost—and so did all of the others. Thatcher was relatively inexperienced by British standards when she became Conservative leader, but she had been a member of the Macmillan, Home, and Heath administrations for six and a half years and a member of the Heath cabinet for three and a half. Callaghan, as mentioned earlier, had held all three of the top posts in the British system. Moreover, at the time of their selection as party leaders both Thatcher and Callaghan were members of Parliament. Callaghan was also foreign secretary.[12]

3. *The candidates in the United States were assessed and voted upon by party activists in some states but mainly by voters in primary elections. No special weight was attached to the views of public officeholders or to the views of those who had worked with the candidates or had had a chance to observe them at first hand.* Senators, congressmen, governors, and others were in a position to endorse whichever candidates they preferred, and the candidates' own extensive travels enabled thousands of voters at least to catch a glimpse of them; but most activists and primary electors probably paid little attention to the endorsements, and of course the great majority had never been in the physical presence of any of the candidates, let alone done business with them. Instead they were forced to form their impressions from what they could read in the printed media or see on television. The candidates' performances were all there was, and except for the incumbent presidents, Ford in 1976 and Carter in 1980, the performances that mattered were not in high office but on the small screen. Hence the large role played by the mass media in the selection of American presidential candidates; hence also the uneasiness of many people in the American media about the role that they play.[13] The contrast with the British

[12] Much the best, indeed almost the only, comparative study of the selection of British prime ministers and American presidents is Hugh Heclo, "Presidential and Prime Ministerial Selection," in Donald R. Matthews, ed., *Perspectives on Presidential Selection* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1973). Heclo, writing in 1973, emphasized the experience of American presidents and presidential candidates; in 1981 the picture looks somewhat different.

[13] See, for example, David Broder's remarks about the "unhealthy and unnatural

system in this connection is complete. Thatcher and Callaghan were chosen by their fellow MPs—that is, by political insiders—and by no one else.

4. *The campaigns of would-be presidential nominees in the United States last for a very long time.* There is hardly any need to labor this point. Thatcher's campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party took twelve weeks; Reagan's campaign for the leadership of the Republican party took the best part of twelve years. The Labour party in March/April 1976 took three weeks to elect its new leader; Carter was on the campaign trail more or less continuously from the summer of 1974 until the summer of 1976. In the United States, staying power is at a premium.

5. *Campaigns for presidential nominations in the United States involve an enormous amount of wear and tear on the part of the candidates and their families.* "Wear and tear" is not easy to measure, and that which exhausts one person can be counted on to exhilarate another. Nevertheless, anyone reading accounts of would-be presidential nominees stumping the country must be impressed by the heavy toll that the whole process exacts: loss of sleep, loss of privacy, disrupted schedules, news conferences at which no one shows up, the endless room-service meals, the long, dreary hours in airport lounges. The same words keep cropping up: "grueling," "exhausting," "tiredness," "fatigue." Vignettes stick in the mind: Edmund Muskie weeping in the snows of New Hampshire, Jimmy Carter sprawled full-length on a sofa at LaGuardia Airport waiting for a long-delayed plane and seizing "an opportunity to at least make up for nights of lost sleep."[14] The essential point is that someone who wishes to compete for a major-party presidential nomination in the United States has to cast his life in an entirely new mold. Campaigning in primaries and caucuses is not something that one does part time, in the midst of other activities. It becomes, in itself, a way of life—"a severe test," in the words of Morris Udall, "of your stamina, your digestion, your marriage and your sense of humor."[15] Among recent candidates, only Ronald Reagan seems to have been able to avoid

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significance [of] the role of the mass media," in *Choosing Presidential Candidates: How Good Is the New Way?* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1979), p. 11, and also a large number of the comments in John Foley, Dennis A. Britton, and Eugene B. Everett, Jr., eds., *Nominating a President: The Process and the Press* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

[14] Schram, *Running for President*, p. 118.

[15] Quoted by Saul Pett, "Ex-Candidates, on Presidential Race: Mad, Mad Marathon," *New York Times*, August 30, 1980. The Pett article is full of good stories about the awfulness of campaigning for the presidency.

some of the strain. Even when he first ran for the governorship of California at the age of fifty-five, he often managed a nap in the afternoon.[16] Again, the contrast between the all-consuming nature of American presidential nominating politics and the more low-key, contained way in which Thatcher and Callaghan were elected in Britain is striking.

6. *The campaigns in the United States cost enormous sums of money, and the candidates and their staffs have to devote a great deal of time and effort to raising money.* Jimmy Carter launched his campaign for the Democratic nomination by writing to potential campaign contributors, and raising money is one of the key tasks of American campaign organizations, even at the prenomination stage. Television and radio time have to be paid for; so do newspaper advertisements, direct mailings, travel facilities, staffers, consultants, opinion polls, and telephone calls. While the Federal Election Campaign Act has relieved some of the pressure on fund raisers by providing for federal underwriting of both primary and general election contests, at the same time the new legislation forces candidates to raise much larger numbers of small contributions. Quite apart from changes in the law, the costs of campaigning in the United States are high—much higher than in most other countries—and continue to rise. In 1976, the Democratic and Republican preconvention campaigns cost the participants and the federal government roughly $67 million; in 1980, the total was nearer $100 million.[17] If the rough estimates given above of the costs of Britain's two party-leadership elections in 1975 and 1976 are accepted as broadly accurate, then the costs of selecting American presidential candidates are some eight to ten thousand times greater than the costs of selecting party leaders in Britain.

7. *The process of selecting presidential candidates in the United States is by no means an exclusively party process.* On the contrary, as has often been pointed out, American political parties in the 1980s are not stable organizations, like parties in most other countries; they are rather prizes to be competed for. Most recent presidential aspirants have had long associations with the Democratic or the Republican party; but they need not have had. More to the point, those deciding who will be the party's standard-bearer in a presidential election include people who regard themselves as party regulars; but

[16] Adam Clymer, "A Star Is Born," in Smith et al., *Reagan*, p. 11.

[17] For the 1976 figures, see Stephen J. Wayne, *The Road to the White House: The Politics of Presidential Elections* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 28. The 1980 figures are taken from Herbert E. Alexander, "Financing the Campaigns and Parties of 1980" (Paper delivered at Sangamon State University, Springfield, Illinois, December 3, 1980).

they also include, in far greater numbers, people with no continuing commitment to the party, people with no commitment to any party, and even people strongly committed to the opposition party. Such are the consequences of opening the candidate selection process to ordinary voters in primary elections. Yet again, the contrast with Britain is marked—indeed total.

8. *Electoral considerations may have loomed large in the minds of many of the party regulars who attended caucuses in 1976 and 1980, but they probably figured scarcely at all in the minds of most voters in the primaries.* American presidential nominating contests used to be concerned, in large part, with "picking a winner." The delegates to the quadrennial conventions wanted a man to head the ticket who would pull in the party's other candidates on his coattails. Those days are gone. Not only are presidential candidates' coattails badly frayed in an age of split-ticket voting, but those who select candidates for the presidency—chiefly voters in primaries—are hardly concerned with complicated tactical considerations. They seldom ask, Which of these candidates do I think other people would be most likely to vote for if he were the candidate of my party? Rather, they ask simply, Who would I like to be president? Even more important is the fact that those who vote in primary elections are in no sense a microcosm of the electorate as a whole. Not only are they vastly fewer in number (32.3 million people voted in the primaries in 1980, 86.5 million in the November election), but all of the available studies indicate that they are a highly biased sample of the total population; they are more highly educated, more interested in politics, and considerably more likely than the electorate as a whole to hold extreme views.[18] In addition to all this, the system, as it now functions, makes it possible for a contender to "win" the primaries and to go on to become his party's presidential candidate even though he has won substantially less than half of the votes cast in the primaries; for example, in 1976 Carter "won" the Democratic primaries with only 39.9 percent of the total vote.[19] In other words, under the present system a party's candidate can be the choice of a minority of a

[18] Voters in primary elections are still just about the most understudied major participants in American political life; but see Austin Ranney and Leon D. Epstein, "The Two Electorates: Voters and Non-Voters in a Wisconsin Primary," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 28 (1966), pp. 598-616; Austin Ranney, "The Representativeness of Primary Electorates," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, vol. 12 (1968), pp. 224-38; and Austin Ranney, "Turnout and Representation in Presidential Primary Elections," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 66 (1972), pp. 21-37.

[19] Gerald M. Pomper et al., *The Election of 1976: Reports and Interpretations* (New York: Longmans, 1977), pp. 14-15.

minority—and a biased minority at that. The bizarre outcome in 1980 was that the most open, most "democratic" leadership-selection system ever devised resulted in the nomination of the two least-respected and least-admired presidential candidates in modern American history. There should, however, have been no surprise about this, given the nature of the primary electorate. Even if there were a national primary, or a system in which would-be candidates had to secure 50 percent plus one of the primary vote in order to be nominated, it would still be perfectly possible for the minority of primary voters to plump for candidates whom the majority of the whole electorate did not want. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that in Britain members of Parliament, who might be thought to have a personal stake in picking a winner, nevertheless frequently, like voters in primaries in the United States, choose a leader who is not the person that the voters at large prefer.[20]

Despite this last, rather unexpected similarity between the British and American systems for choosing party leaders and presidential candidates, the two systems are otherwise different in almost every particular: in who the potential candidates are, in who does the choosing, in how the choices are made. The contrast, in fact, is virtually complete.

Assessing the American System

The facts having been established, we now need to offer some assessment of them. Needless to say, it is not the purpose of this chapter to argue that "British is best." The British case was chosen, as we said earlier, partly because it is well documented, partly because it offers such a striking contrast to the American, but chiefly because the leadership selection systems in most liberal democracies resemble the British more closely than the American; the American system could equally well have been compared with, say, the Australian or the Swedish. In any case, the British system is neither perfect nor immutable. The Conservatives adopted their present arrangements as recently as 1965; the Labour party in 1980–1981 was taking active steps to adopt an entirely new system, one that would give a large say in the election of Labour leaders—and hence of potential Labour prime ministers—to the massed battalions of Britain's trade unions and to the party's activists in the constituencies.[21]

[20] See section "A European Contrast" and n. 10.

[21] At its regular annual conference in Blackpool in October 1980, the Labour party voted to extend the franchise in its leadership elections beyond the parlia-

The contrast between the British system and the American does, however, serve to point up certain weaknesses inherent in the present American system, weaknesses of which many people in the United States are well aware.

To begin with, the length of the American nominating process and its grueling character undoubtedly have the effect of causing many able men and women to eliminate themselves from the race before it has even begun. Candidates in any system are, of course, compared with other candidates, but they should also be compared with non-candidates—people who might have run but chose not to. We ought to ask: Are there able and qualified persons who might make good presidents but are deterred from seeking their party's presidential nomination by the present arrangements? Suppose for the sake of argument that the pool of potential presidential candidates is taken to consist of serving U.S. senators and congressmen and state governors. Are there people in this pool who, contemplating the race as it now is, a combination of high hurdles and marathon, say to themselves, "I want no part of it"? It would be amazing if such people did not exist; rumor suggests that they do.[22] The most famous case of someone who did enter the race but abandoned it after completing the first lap is Walter Mondale, later vice-president under Carter. Mondale stumped the country between 1972 and 1974 with his eye on the 1976 Democratic nomination, but he did not like what incessant campaigning was doing to himself and his family, and he quit in November 1974, more than a year before the first primary. He announced in a public statement:

> I found I did not have the overwhelming desire to be President which is essential for the kind of campaign that is required. . . . I don't think anyone should be President who is not willing to go through the fire. . . . I admire those with

mentary party. At a special conference in Wembley in January 1981, it decided that trade unions should have 40 percent of the vote in Labour leadership elections, constituency activists 30 percent, and Labour members of Parliament, who had hitherto had 100 percent, only the remaining 30 percent. Hardly had the Wembley decision been taken, however, than there were moves afoot to try, at the next regular conference in Brighton in October 1981, to improve the parliamentary party's position. Whatever the outcome of that conference, it seemed all but certain in the summer of 1981 that Labour's leadership-election system described earlier in this chapter had gone forever. The conservatives' system, however, was likely to remain the same.

[22] The present writer is personally aware of at least one member of the House of Representatives, who, although he might well make an electable presidential candidate and a first-class president, decided long ago that the race was simply not worth running: the costs are too great, the chances of success too slight.

> the determination to do what is required to seek the presidency, but I have found I am not among them.[23]

How many other able men and women have, to the nation's cost, made the same discovery?

Mondale made his abortive bid for the presidency while a senator and a leading member of his party in the upper house. He knew perfectly well that, in his bid, he was handicapped as a candidate by being a senator and handicapped as a senator by being a candidate. So time- and energy-consuming has the pursuit of the presidency become that those who currently hold high public office are at a distinct disadvantage compared with those who do not. Not only can those who have left office behind them, or indeed never held it, devote more time and energy to campaigning, but they do not constantly have to choose between fulfilling their primary office-holding responsibilities and following the dictates of their personal ambition. "That was very clearly illustrated by Senator Jackson who in 1976 was continually torn between the needs of a presidential campaign and the needs of being in the Senate, especially for discussion of those issues on which he [had] the greatest expertise."[24] Howard Baker was probably putting it a little strongly in 1980 when he suggested that the current American system "requires you to be unemployed to be a successful candidate"; but the fact remains that, vice-presidents and incumbent presidents apart, three of the last four presidential nominees—Nixon, Carter, and Reagan—held no public office, major or minor, at the time of their nomination.[25] If those who hold no public office are indeed at an advantage over their office-holding rivals, it follows that future presidents of the United States, like the last two on the day of their inauguration, are likely to be

[23] Quoted in Arthur T. Hadley, *The Invisible Primary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 38. Portions of the Hadley volume concerning Mondale are reprinted in James I. Lengle and Byron E. Shafer, eds., *Presidential Politics: Readings on Nominations and Elections* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 69-77. Michael J. Robinson has similarly observed: "The primary system has made it so that the nice guys, including the competent ones, stay out of the whole ordeal. Right from the start, the primary system means that only those who possess near psychopathic ambition and temperament will get involved and stay involved." These and other similar remarks are quoted in Herbert B. Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics: Voters, Candidates, and Campaigns since 1952*, 2d ed. (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1980), p. 307.

[24] Jeane J. Kirkpatrick in Jeane J. Kirkpatrick et al., *The Presidential Nominating Process: Can It Be Improved?* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), pp. 9-10.

[25] Baker is quoted in Pett, "Ex-Candidates, on Presidential Race."

individuals without, as Howard Baker put it, "current information about the problems that confront the country."[26]

Presidential candidates under the American system may well not be immersed currently in national and international problems; it is also true that they may never have been so immersed. Carter in 1976 had never been nearer Washington (let alone London, Paris, Bonn, Moscow, or Peking) than Atlanta; Reagan in 1980 had never been nearer than Sacramento.[27] In the British and most other leadership-selection systems, the formal rules, or alternatively the informal norms, require that would-be national leaders should have had substantial national-level political experience, typically in both the executive and the legislative branches of government. Even if the rules and norms in these countries did not so require, it is still likely that, in any system in which those who choose national party leaders include a significant proportion of people who are themselves national-level politicians, the results will tend to favor people from similar backgrounds; whatever the rules, national politicians will tend to choose other national politicians. In the United States, by contrast, neither the rules and norms nor the men and women who select presidential candidates—whether voters in primaries or delegates to state caucuses and conventions—appear to attach any great significance to high-level experience of government in Washington. On the contrary, both Carter and Reagan were able to make a virtue out of being their party's non-Washington, even anti-Washington, presidential candidate. They arrived in Washington the first two presidents since Woodrow Wilson wholly innocent of national-level governmental experience.[28] Most observers thought that the results were all too apparent in Carter's four-year term of office; it remains to be seen whether Reagan will learn more and faster.

More generally, a disjunction seems to have developed in the United States between the qualities required to win the presidential nomination of one's party and the qualities required to be a good president. To win the nomination, a person needs to be able to attract media attention, to be able to communicate easily with ordinary

[26] Ibid.

[27] The literal-minded may protest that both men had traveled widely and that Carter had played a prominent part in the so-called Trilateral Commission. But of course that is not the point: to visit Washington, even on business, is not the same as working there. Carter as president showed no real understanding either of politics in Washington or of how the world looked from the vantage point of foreign capitals.

[28] See the table in Heclo, "Presidential and Prime Ministerial Selection," pp. 31-32.

citizens, above all to be able to project an attractive image of himself on the small screen. He needs, in other words, to be someone who can convey a lot in a few words to a very large number of people. Some of these skills are required by an incumbent president, but some of them are not (presidents of the United States have no need to attract media attention: they have far too much already). More to the point, to win a presidential nomination in the age of caucuses and primaries, a person no longer has to do business with others, to build coalitions, or to bargain with people who possess things that he should acquire if he is to achieve his goals. It is enough that he be a supersalesman of himself. Before 1968 in the United States, a man who wanted to be president had to build a coalition out of the very same elements—members of Congress, big-state governors, big-city mayors, the leaders of major interest groups—upon which he would have to rely if and when he reached the White House. Not so in the 1980s:

> In the present nominating system, he comes as a fellow whose only coalition is whatever he got out of the living rooms in Iowa. If there is one thing that Jimmy Carter's frustration in office ought to teach us, it is that the affiliation and the commitment that is made on Iowa caucus night and New Hampshire primary day is not by itself sufficient to sustain a man for four years in the White House.[29]

Such problems are, of course, short-circuited in a leadership-selection system like the British: The people with whom a party leader will have to work are the very people who elected him.

Underlying both the lack of experience exhibited by recent presidential candidates, and also doubts about whether they have the requisite political skills, is the fact, all but unique to the modern American political system, that the elected officeholders of a party play almost no part in selecting the party's presidential nominee. This fact has been mentioned before, but it needs to be emphasized again. In almost every political system but the American, the man or woman who wants to make it to the top needs to acquire the support of people who have been in the best position, usually over a considerable period of many years, to observe him or her at close range: namely, the individual's fellow national politicians. Such politicians are better placed than anyone else could possibly be to assess their colleague's strengths and weaknesses, many of which are likely to manifest themselves, not in front of the television cameras, but in the cut and thrust of legislative debate or behind the closed doors of committee rooms.

[29] David Broder in *Choosing Presidential Candidates*, pp. 7-8.

In most political systems, these national-level politicians act as a sort of screening device or filter between the political parties and the mass electorate; they provide, in the American jargon, an element of "peer review." This element is entirely missing in the United States today.[30]

The primary-centered method of choosing presidential candidates is also part cause and part consequence of the general decline of America's political parties. Parties in the United States, as has often been pointed out, no longer provide cues to the electorate on the scale that they once did; they no longer even control their own nominations. The results are hard to disentangle from other important changes taking place within the American polity; but it seems reasonable to associate the decline of parties with the further blurring of lines of responsibility and accountability in the American system, the increasing alienation and frustration of the American electorate, the continuing assertiveness of interest groups, especially single-interest groups, the personalization of American politics, the seeming inability of Congress and the presidency to work together, and, more generally, a tendency in American government, reminiscent of the French Fourth Republic, toward immobilism and stalemate. If America's parties were to disappear completely—

> the candidate organizations, the women's caucuses, the black caucuses, the right-to-life leagues, and the like would become the only real players in the game. The mass communications media would become the sole agencies for sorting out the finalists from the original entrants [in presidential nominating politics] and for defining the voters' choices. And the societal functions of interest-aggregation, consensus-building and civil war–prevention would presumably be left to the schools, the churches, and perhaps Common Cause and Nader's Raiders.[31]

If such an outcome is to be avoided, changes will almost certainly need to be made in the way in which presidential candidates are selected. A larger strictly "party" element in the selection of presidential nominees will have to be reintroduced, if not on the British model, then on some other.[32]

[30] On the question of peer review, see David Broder in *Choosing Presidential Candidates*, p. 3; and Austin Ranney in Kirkpatrick et al., *The Presidential Nominating Process*, p. 6.

[31] Austin Ranney, "The Political Parties: Reform and Decline" in Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), p. 247.

[32] For a variety of suggestions on how the presidential nominating process might be reformed—or, rather, improved—see Kirkpatrick et al., *The Presidential*

Another consequence of the primary-centered method of choosing presidential candidates is to increase greatly the political vulnerability of first-term presidential incumbents. Once upon a time, a president of the United States, however disastrous, could count on being renominated by his party (always assuming that he wanted to be). To so great an extent did incumbency matter. It now matters a great deal less, and in an era of intractable international and economic problems may even be a handicap. Ford in 1976 and Carter in 1980 only just managed to fight off the challenges of rival candidates within their own parties; Reagan will be very lucky not to face a similar challenge in 1984. Opinions differ about the desirability of first-term presidents' being vulnerable in this way. On the one hand, it can be argued that the fear of formidable challenges in the primaries makes American presidents more sensitive to the wishes of the American people than they used to be; on the other, it can be alleged that, precisely because they are fearful of such challenges, they may conduct themselves from the moment of their inauguration with one eye on the electorate. Whatever the merits of this particular debate, it is clear that for the foreseeable future first-term presidents will spend enormous amounts of time and energy in their third and fourth years in office trying to make sure that they are renominated as well as reelected. Whether presidents can afford to spend quite such large quantities of time and energy in this way is open to question.

Finally, it is worth commenting on one rather strange consequence of the virtually total elimination of the element of peer review from American presidential politics. Peer groups, to be sure, have a way of becoming completely obsessed with their own internal dynamics, of becoming oblivious of the needs and desires of the outside world; but at the same time such groups often have the ability to make very accurate judgments about their own members—to overlook their superficial characteristics and to evaluate them at their true worth. In Britain in recent years, the Conservatives have been adventurous enough to choose a woman as their leader; similarly, the Labour party, in electing Michael Foot as James Callaghan's successor toward the end of 1980, showed itself prepared to elect a somewhat improbable-looking old man with untidy hair, thick spectacles, and a walk like Charlie Chaplin's. It is clear that in both cases their chances of selec-

Nominating Process, pp. 15-27; Everett Carll Ladd, "A Better Way to Pick Presidents," *Fortune*, May 5, 1980, pp. 132-37; and Tom Wicker, "The Elections: Why the System Has Failed," *New York Review of Books*, August 14, 1980, pp. 11-15. Almost all the suggestions for improvement involve giving a larger say in the nominating process to a party's public officeholders and more generally to people with a continuing commitment to the party.

tion were considerably greater among their fellow MPs, their peers, than if the choice had been made by millions of ordinary voters with no more to go on than what they could see on their television screens. One does not have to be an especial admirer of either Thatcher or Foot to acknowledge the possibility that a small-group, face-to-face system, containing a large element of peer review, may considerably widen the range of potential national leaders. "Presidents today," as Jeane Kirkpatrick has written concerning the post-1968 presidential nominating process, "must be fit and not fat, amusing not dull, with cool not hot personalities."[33] She might have added that they must also be white and male. It is, however, not proven that great American presidents are to be found only in the ranks of the thin, the amusing, the cool, the white, the male, the glib, the invariably smiling, and the televisually presentable—even though the present arrangements for choosing American presidential nominees clearly assume that they are. By a strange but not uncommon irony, a system designed to maximize "openness" has probably had the unintended effect of barring the way to the top in American politics of a very large proportion of America's population.[34]

No system of selecting political leaders, as we said right at the beginning, can guarantee success; none is foolproof. Other countries, including Britain, have produced their duds; the old ways of nominating presidential candidates in the United States yielded such second-raters, all within the same decade, as Warren G. Harding, James M. Cox, Calvin Coolidge, and John W. Davis. It may be that in 1984 the American people will be offered a more impressive choice than they were in 1980. It may be, too, that Ronald Reagan will turn out to be a better president than many people expect; it certainly behooves the rest of the world to suspend judgment. All the same, it must be said that America's friends abroad view with considerable apprehension the prospect of a long line of Carters and Reagans as presidential candidates. It does seem that recent developments in the American presidential nominating system have greatly increased the probability

[33] Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), p. 7.

[34] This argument must not be pressed too far. A peer group may be extraordinarily conventional in its judgments if its members are guided not by what they think but by what they think others think. To take the obvious case, it took a primary election, in West Virginia in 1960, to persuade the leaders of the Democratic party that a Catholic could be elected president. Most European systems differ from the American in that voters are being asked to vote for a party as a whole, not for a single individual. Under these circumstances the personality of the leader is likely to be less important electorally.

that men will be nominated who lack relevant experience and have no evident aptitude for one of the most demanding and powerful jobs on earth. Changes in the system that had the effect of reducing the role of primary elections and of providing for an increased element of peer review would be enormously welcomed by most of America's friends and allies in Europe and—dare one say it?—probably in the end by most Americans too.