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## The History Of Election Day In Philadelphia: A Study In American Political Ritual

Mark Winston Brewin

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# The History Of Election Day In Philadelphia: A Study In American Political Ritual

## Abstract

The dissertation is a history of Election Day practices, and the public discourse about Election Day, in the city of Philadelphia, from the early 1700s to the present time. The questions animating the work are two-fold. First, a historical question: how and why did Election Day disappear as a public celebration in Philadelphia's civic calendar? Second, a theoretical question: what general statements can we make about the message that the performance of an Election Day sends to a population like the voting public of Philadelphia? The answer to the first question is that the disappearance of Election Day's more spectacular, obvious, and public features— especially those that emphasized bodily communication—was part of a more general shift in American public culture. This was shift away from populist, vulgar forms of publicity toward a more personalized, sedate, and textualized style. The answer to the second question is that Election Day, like many other forms of ritual, is a mode of communication that addresses particularly the tensions and paradoxes within a society—whether these be tensions between classes of people or between worldviews. Because Election Day is a public illustration of the democratic paradox, it provides an important forum in which the public can reflect upon and struggle with central questions within the culture. Its disappearance as public holiday thus marks a significant loss for democratic life.

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Communication

## First Advisor

Elihu Katz

**THE HISTORY OF ELECTION DAY IN PHILADELPHIA:  
A STUDY IN AMERICAN POLITICAL RITUAL**

**Mark Winston Brewin**

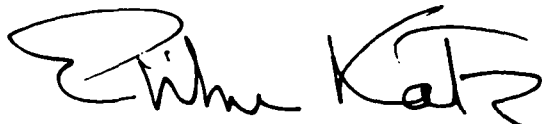
**A DISSERTATION**

**in**

**Communication**

**Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**2002**



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**Supervisor of Dissertation**



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**Graduate Group Chairperson**

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## **Acknowledgments**

When I was thirteen years old I went to a weeklong basketball camp in Pullman, Washington. On about the third day of the camp, one of the coaches looked down at me, smiled, and—evidently impressed both with an almost total lack of athletic ability and my stubborn determination to ignore that fact—said something like, “Brewin, it takes you a while, but you finally get there.” Which is about how I feel now.

That I finished this project at all was due not just to my own labors but those of a great many other people. Most notably this includes my advisor, Elihu Katz, who put up with much confusion and vagueness while I was trying to piece together my argument. He often warned me about mistakes I was about to make, and generally I just went ahead and made them anyhow. All of this, without Elihu ever losing his customary good temper. As far as I am aware, he never loses his temper; evidence enough that genius need not always be associated with a difficult personality. The three other members of my dissertation committee—Carolyn Marvin, Barbie Zelizer, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson— did a great deal more work than is customary, I think, for faculty members in their position, and did it with grace and kindness. Whatever is interesting or insightful in this dissertation can probably be traced back to one of these four people. The defects, on the other hand, either through omission, misinterpretation, or simple incompetence, are entirely my own.

I owe thanks to a number of others, as well, so many that I have decided not to list them all, for fear that I would leave someone out. Instead, I would like simply to

take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the other faculty members of the Annenberg School, its staff, and my fellow students, who provided me both with intellectual stimulation and encouragement during my years there. I would also like to thank Ambassador Walter Annenberg, for his support of the school generally, and for his generosity to me personally. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends. My immediate family in particular—my father, my mother, my brother and sister—have long kept faith in me, often without much in the way of justification. My work now and forever will be partly their achievement well as my own.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jane, who started the whole thing off with a question, and kept me going long after she asked it; to my daughter, Zoë Margaret, who still has no idea how important she is; and to another Margaret, who asked to be, and is, remembered.

**Abstract:**

**THE HISTORY OF ELECTION DAY IN PHILADELPHIA:  
A STUDY IN AMERICAN POLITICAL RITUAL**

**Author: Mark W. Brewin  
Supervisor: Dr. Elihu Katz**

The dissertation is a history of Election Day practices, and the public discourse about Election Day, in the city of Philadelphia, from the early 1700s to the present time. The questions animating the work are two-fold. First, a historical question: how and why did Election Day disappear as a public celebration in Philadelphia's civic calendar? Second, a theoretical question: what general statements can we make about the message that the performance of an Election Day sends to a population like the voting public of Philadelphia? The answer to the first question is that the disappearance of Election Day's more spectacular, obvious, and public features—especially those that emphasized bodily communication—was part of a more general shift in American public culture. This was shift away from populist, vulgar forms of publicity toward a more personalized, sedate, and textualized style. The answer to the second question is that Election Day, like many other forms of ritual, is a mode of communication that addresses particularly the tensions and paradoxes within a society—whether these be tensions between classes of people or between worldviews. Because Election Day is a public illustration of the democratic paradox, it provides an important forum in which the public can reflect upon and struggle with central questions within the culture. Its disappearance as public holiday thus marks a significant loss for democratic life.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and methodological review**

This dissertation is a narrative of the changes in the practices, symbols, and meaning of Election Day within the city of Philadelphia. It is an investigation into how Election Day changed, and why it changed, from the popular and notable public event of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the somewhat more muted ritual now practiced. That historical question was used to illustrate a different point, about the role of democratic rituals in a modern Western society like the United States. The aim of this chapter is to explain how I constructed the narrative that I will present, and to explain as well the relationship of that narrative, specific to time and place, to the more general theoretical points I wish to make.

The secondary literature used to construct the dissertation can be divided into three different categories. The first of these consisted of works dealing with the history of American political culture. I include here histories of public festivals, public celebrations, and other public events, histories of the American political party system, including campaign practices,<sup>1</sup> and histories of mass media institutions and the press.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, these accounts tended to agree, in their rough outlines, about how American party politics has evolved over time. The narrative they construct, which I have used to frame my own account, runs as follows. A deferent political culture controlled by a relatively small number of men in the colonial period gives way, following the revolution, to a more ideological and egalitarian electoral politics in the early republic, eventually dominated at the national level by the clash between Federalists and Republicans, two groups which differ fairly substantially in their views



on the direction the new nation should take, and on the implications of the revolution. At this time, the legitimacy of party is tenuous. Although some form of proto-party organization exists, it is underdeveloped in comparison with its later institutional role, and the notion of party is often used as a synonym for self-interested and seditious men, in order to attack the political opposition.<sup>3</sup> The Federalist Era is succeeded by a short period in which the Democratic-Republican Party (associated with Jefferson, Madison, and other prominent Virginians) dominates national politics, and where legislative or party caucuses tend to control candidate nominations.<sup>4</sup> This era in turn evolves into the Jacksonian Age, which sees the introduction of a number of important political innovations. These include a more explicit and extensive use of political symbolism to appeal to voters, a more populist, democratic approach to politics generally, the beginning of national nominating conventions, and the development of the national Presidential campaign. It is at this point that two major national parties, the Whigs and the Democracy, begin to develop a sophisticated and formal party organization that links the individual partisan, through a network of ward, city or county, and state committees and offices, to a national political body, represented by the Presidential candidate.<sup>5</sup> Although this system undergoes a "realignment" just prior to the Civil War, when the new Republican Party essentially enters the political vacuum left by the Whigs, a more important, though less obvious change takes place in the late 1890s, when the parties begin to rely to a much greater extent on mass media campaign literature, and on propaganda produced by party workers in a national office. Presidential candidates, who up until now have generally refused to campaign

personally, relying on other party notables to do that for them, begin to take on a more active role and start the tradition of the national tour. As a result, locally organized campaign events, like pole raisings, torch light parades, and so forth, become less important to the electoral system and gradually disappear.<sup>6</sup> These changes in electoral practice are accompanied by a general shift in the social construction of the voter, in the argument of Michael Schudson. In accordance with Progressive ideology, the importance of party loyalty and party mobilization give way to an emphasis on voter knowledge and on good arguments designed to inform the electorate and persuade the voter through reason and fact.<sup>7</sup> This technocratic vision of politics, voters, and citizens in turn gives way following the Second World War to what Joel Silbey has called a more personalist view of politics.<sup>8</sup> The percentage of independent voters in the Electorate goes up, as does the tendency to vote a split party ticket, while the system experiences a gradual decline in the percentage of voter turnout.<sup>9</sup>

This general narrative, as mentioned, served as the template for my description of the changes in the way that Philadelphia voters have understood themselves, as a public, over the course of Election Day. In presenting it here, I do not wish to give the impression that I believe that American historians and political scientists are basically agreed about the course of American political history. I am well aware that they are not. I have generally attempted to stay clear of their debates, however, since to enter into them too extensively would move me away from my own point. On those questions in which their disagreements touch directly upon my argument—for example, the issue of the extent of corruption and of bribery, and its effect on voter

turnout—I make note of that, and provide my own opinion of the most plausible interpretation of the evidence.

The second general body of historical literature that I used was that dealing with one or more aspects of the Election Day performance itself—voting practices and the style of ballot, the definition and social construction of the electorate, election returns, and other practices such as bonfires, betting, and Election Day violence. These works, too, suggested a general narrative: a gradual extension of the constitutional boundaries of the electorate, which is accompanied by growing use of techniques such as literacy tests, residency requirements, and changes to naturalization laws, to control these boundaries in other ways; the development of the secret ballot—with the introduction of the Australian ballot in most states during the 1890s and early 1900s; a decline in Election Day corruption and violence; and a dramatic shortening of the time required to deliver the voting results to the population.<sup>10</sup>

These two bodies of literature provided me with a theoretical as well as a historical starting point. In many, although not all, of the works cited here, there is an implicit or explicit argument about communication made: that the practice of electoral politics sends a message to the practitioners of what politics is, and what political participation in a modern nation-state means. Some also highlight the fact that many of the norms we hold now about what makes for “good” democratic communication—norms which clash with past styles of campaigning and voting—are historically contingent: the result of past battles between various classes and interest groups, and not simply advances in the theory and practice of electoral democracy. I wanted to

develop this idea as it related to a certain defined event, Election Day. That meant, first, making a series of arguments about what that event communicated to the successive historical publics that performed it. Second, it meant looking for commonalities in these various performances, so as to make a more general argument about what Election Day communicates to a democratic public.

I decided to proceed by combining two different strategies. The first was to create a model of Election Day as ritual, and to argue that as ritual, it communicated a message to the public in a fashion that other forms could not. I make this argument more fully in the next chapter and so will not expand upon it here. The second strategy was to illustrate that theoretical claim about Election Day's distinctiveness with an historical account of a specific American city, Philadelphia. In this work, Philadelphia's Election Day serves as an example of a general form of communication, and as such, I argue, shares important features, as communication, with other examples of that form. In other words, I understood my use of Philadelphia's Election Day, in relation to the larger argument that I was making, as analogous to Geertz's use of the Bali theater state, to advance an argument about political theory.<sup>11</sup>

In order to create the narrative of Philadelphia's Election Day, however, I needed to get a great deal more information about its particular history and practices than was contained in the more general literature. To find that information, I went to a third set of historical works, those dealing with the history of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, and especially of their politics.<sup>12</sup> These writings provided me with an

understanding of the unique social and political context in which the event had occurred over time, and, often, also provided accounts about what past Election Days had looked like.

A more important source for actual accounts, however, were primary source materials drawn from diaries, journals, personal letters, statutes, government documents, memories, court cases, and newspaper articles. Many of these primary sources I obtained from citations in the secondary literature. Other sources were suggested by my reading of the secondary literature, or on the advice of historians of a particular period, or in the course of my archival work. The archives I used for primary source material were personal collections and letter books in the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, several manuscripts in the Rare Books section of the University of Pennsylvania library, previously published collections of letters, diaries, government documents, and journals in the University of Pennsylvania library and elsewhere—the Penn-Logan Correspondence, for example, or the *Pennsylvania Archive* series, or the edited papers of politicians such as Benjamin Franklin—and legal and government documents from the library of the University of Pennsylvania’s Law School. This data was especially valuable for earlier periods, when journalistic accounts of Election Day were rare, although it was useful throughout the narrative in that it provided an alternative view of Election Day from the accounts in the newspapers. The relationship of this primary material to the narrative in general, then, was to help flesh out and fill in the rough picture of Election Day that the reading of the secondary histories had provided.

Finally, in addition to this research, I undertook archival research on the representation of Election Day in the city's newspapers. My choice of journals was determined by the following criteria. First, I relied on secondary histories for suggestions about which newspapers played important political roles in the city's history at various periods: examples would be the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during the colonial era, *The Aurora* and the *Gazette of the United States* during the federalist era, the *Public Ledger*, *The Democratic Press*, *The North American*, and *The Inquirer* during the nineteenth century. Also, for almost every period after the revolution I tried to balance the coverage between opposing newspapers, examining the *Gazette's* coverage along with the *Aurora's*, or *The Age's* coverage along with the *Press* and *The Inquirer*. For some periods this was more difficult than others, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Philadelphia's Democratic Party was very weak and does not seem to have been able to support a newspaper for any length of time, as far as I can tell. In that case, I used non-partisan papers, like the *Public Ledger*, to provide balance to the coverage of the Republican papers like *The Press*, *The Bulletin*, and *The Inquirer*. This work left me with at least one journalistic account, and generally more than one, of every Presidential Election Day in the city of Philadelphia since the election of George Washington (the exception being 1800, when Pennsylvania did not hold a popular vote for Presidential electors).

During the colonial period, the relatively limited number of papers available meant that I could examine election editions for almost every year, starting from 1717, the first *American Weekly Mercury* published, to the revolution. In each year, I would

begin with the newspaper two weeks prior to the first of October, and end with the edition that carried the returns from the election. After the revolutionary period, and especially after the 1796 election, I began to focus on years of Presidential Elections. For every Presidential election in the city of Philadelphia, I looked at newspaper coverage from at least one newspaper from the Sunday preceding the Election Day to the moment when victory was announced for one candidate or another. In the years preceding the conglomeration of the general and presidential Election Days, I generally started the coverage in the last week of September or the first week in October. It was not always possible to get the all of the necessary issues of all of the newspapers I searched, since the archives for some of the newspapers I looked at are incomplete (for example, *The Democratic Press* in the 1810s). In addition to this coverage I also examined newspaper stories cited in secondary literature that seemed relevant to the topic, either because they discussed voting or discussed elections.

The use of newspapers and other news media sources provided two different types of information. First, especially following the victory of Jackson and up to about the Second World War, they were probably the most extensive and complete descriptions of what happened on Election Day itself. Because of their generally partisan intent, their descriptions needed to be handled with some care. This was one reason why the use of newspapers with differing political agendas—Whig, Democrat, or independent—was so helpful in providing a fuller account of what a particular Election Day might have looked like. At the same time, as a form of media that framed and gave form to the Election Day experience for many Philadelphians, the

newspapers were part of the ritual that I was describing. As the city newspaper changed in style and tone, as its institutional role changed, the experience of Election Day itself changed. This was the other reason why the study of newspaper coverage was important. The history of Election Day is, in part, a history of the changing form and role of the mass media on Election Day.

Thus, the use of the sources in the dissertation could be described as follows. I attempted, in effect, to combine the theoretical literature on ritual in the next chapter, with the historical work of American parties and voting practices mentioned in this chapter, to provoke a rethinking about what Election Day had meant in the history of an American city like Philadelphia, and what its continued relevance may still be for the future of public life. The use of the historical secondary literature about the politics of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in combination with the primary sources I discovered, provide an account of the history of a single public event, from the beginning of the nation's history to the modern times, in order to illustrate the more general point I wish to make about political ritual, and an Election Day ritual in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the works cited below, which tended to deal with American political culture and party practices of specific periods, I relied as well upon: Richard Jensen, "Party Coalitions and the Search for Modern Values: 1820-1970," in *Party coalitions in the 1980s*, Seymour Martin Lipset, ed. (San Francisco, CA: Institute for contemporary studies, 1981); Robert Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: a history of election practices* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Campaigns* (Oxford: New York, 1984); Richard Jensen, "Armies, admen, and crusaders: types of presidential election campaigns," *History Teacher*, 2 (1969); Michael Schudson, *The good citizen: a history of American civic life* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The form of the news: a history* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001); Thomas Leonard, *The power of the press: the birth of American political reporting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the news: a social history of American newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Frank Mott, *American Journalism: a history, 1690-1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).



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<sup>3</sup> For a general understanding of party politics in the period, I have relied upon the accounts of Jackson Main, *Political parties before the constitution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1973); George D. Luetscher, *Early party machinery in the United States* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971[1902]); Michael Schudson, "Sending a political message: lessons from the American 1790s," *Media, culture, and society*, 19(3) 1997, pp. 315-318; Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics, the early republic's political culture, 1789-1840" *The American Political Science Review*, 68(2) 1974, pp. 473-487; William O. Lynch, *Fifty years of American party warfare* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-merrill, 1931); Gordon Wood, *The radicalism of the American revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), as well as the state histories of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia mentioned in note 12, below. For discussions of public life of the period I have relied on: Albrecht Koschnik, "Political conflict and public contest: rituals of national celebration in Philadelphia, 1788-1815," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 118(3), 1994; Simon Newman, *Parades and the politics of the street: festive culture in the early American public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); David Waldstreicher, "Rites of rebellion, rites of assent: celebrations, print culture, and the origins of American nationalism," *The Journal of American History*, 82(1), 1995, pp. 37-61; and Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes: the making of American nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, Omohundro Institute, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> McCormick, *The Presidential Game: the origins of American presidential politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); also Sanford W. Higginbotham, *The Keystone in the Democratic Arch: PA Politics, 1800-1816*, PhD dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> The literature on this period, as with all others, is fairly extensive. My primary sources of orientation were: Mary Douglas, *Civic wars: democracy and public life in the American city during the nineteenth century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Jean Baker, *Affairs of party: the political culture of Northern Democrats in the mid-nineteenth century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Joel Silbey, *The American political nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Lee Benson, *The concept of Jacksonian democracy: New York as a test case* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Richard McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966); William E. Gienapp, "Politics seemed to enter into everything," in *Essays on American Antebellum politics, 1840-1860*, eds. Stephen Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station: published by the University of Texas, Arlington by Texas A & M University, 1982), pp. 15-69; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Run, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of the President, 1884* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Besides Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*; and Jensen, "search for modern values," mentioned in note 1 above, see also Paul Kleppner, *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893-1928* (Westport, CT, Greenwood: 1987); Michael McGerr, *The decline of popular politics: the American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 69-77.

<sup>8</sup> Silbey, *The American political nation*, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Works I have used for my understanding of the modern American voting public are Walter D. Burnham, "The changing shape of the American political universe," *The American Political Science Review*, 1965, 59(1) pp. 7-28; Burnham, "The Appearance and Disappearance of the American Voter," in *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Ruy Teixeira, *Why American's don't vote: turnout decline in the United States, 1960-1984* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); University of Michigan Survey Research Center (Angus Campell, et al.) *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1996); Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, John Petrocik, *The changing American voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1979). The argument for the emergence of a "postmodern public" based on lifestyle and cultural attitudes, evolving out of modern public resting largely on class distinctions, is made by Ronald Inglehart. See for example *Modernization and postmodernization: cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

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<sup>10</sup> For a general discussion of voting practices and Election Day events, I have used: Cortlandt F. Bishop, *History of Elections in the American Colonies* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968); Robert Dinkin, *Voting in provincial America: a study of elections in the thirteen colonies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Dinkin, *Voting in revolutionary America: a study of elections in the thirteen original states, 1776-1789* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Kate Kelly, *Election Day: History of an American Holiday* (New York: Facts on File, 1991); Joseph Harris, *Election administration in the United States* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1934); Richard McCormick, *The history of voting in New Jersey: a study of the development of election machinery, 1664-1911* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953); John F. Reynolds, *Testing Democracy: Electoral behavior and Progressive reform in New Jersey, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1988). There were a number of works from the earlier literature, mentioned in note 1, also important in this task. These include: Summers, *Run, Romanism, and Rebellion*; Schudson, *The good citizen*; and Baker, *Affairs of party*. For changes in the ballot as a technology, I have used: Peter H. Argersinger, "A place on the ballot: fusion politics and antifusion laws," *The American Historical Review*, 85.2 (1980); Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "Identifiable Voting in Nineteenth-Century America: Toward a Comparison of Britain and the United States before the Secret Ballot," *Perspectives in American History*, 11 (1977-78); L.E. Fredman, *The Australian Ballot: the story of an American Reform* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1968); Evans, Elder Cobb, *A history of the Australian Ballot System in the United States*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1917; and Ronnie Dugger, "Annals of Democracy: counting votes," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 7, 1988. My discussion of the changes in returns drew from Thomas W. Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1916-1948," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 12.3 (1968); Thomas Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1952-1976," *Journal of Communication*, 30.4 (1980); Thomas Littlewood, *Calling Elections: the history of horse-race journalism* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1998); John Morely Matheson, *Steam Packet to Magic Lantern: a history of Elections Returns coverage in four Illinois cities*, PhD dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1967. Reports of violence on the election grounds came from various sources but included: Michael Feldberg, *The turbulent era: riot and disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Paul Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996); Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours: on the past and future of the black city in America* (Oxford University Press, New York: 1991); and Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the people: the rise of popular sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988). The two general sources I referred to in the discussions of changes to the franchise were: Chilton Williamson, *American suffrage: from property to democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Alexander Keyssar, *The right to vote: the contested history of democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: the theater state in nineteenth-century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> These histories include, for the colonial period: Peter Thompson, *Rum punch and revolution: taverngoing & public life in eighteenth-century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999); Richard R. Beeman, "Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third Series, vol. 49.3 (1992); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: the formation of Philadelphia's black community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Alan Tully, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests and Institutions in colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Str. Joan de Lourdes Leonard, "Elections in Colonial Pennsylvania," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third Series, 11.3 (1954). For the federalist period: Roland M. Baumann, *The Democratic-Republicans of Pennsylvania, The Origins, 1776-1797*, Ph.D. dissertation, 1970, Pennsylvania State University; Robert L. Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1942); Bernard Fay, "Early party machinery in the United States: Pennsylvania in the election of 1796," *PMH& B*, 60(4), 1936, pp. 375-390; Bernard Fay, *The two Franklins: fathers of American democracy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933); Harry Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790-1801, a study in national stimulus and local*

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*response* (Philadelphia: np, 1950); Richard Miller, *Philadelphia—the Federalist city: a study of urban politics, 1789-1801* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1976); Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., “John Beckley: An Early American Party Manager,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 13.1 (1956); for the “era of good feeling,” I relied largely on Higginbotham, *The Keystone in the Democratic Arch: PA Politics, 1800-1816*; For the nineteenth century: Charles McCool Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1833-1848* (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1958); Erwin Stanley Bradley, *The triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics 1860-1872* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964); Philip Klein, *Pennsylvania politics, 1817-1832, a game without rules* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1940); Peter McCaffery, *When bosses ruled Philadelphia: the emergence of the Republican machine, 1867-1933* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Edward Price, “The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 100.3 (1976). Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up: The life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824-1901* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989); Eric Ledell Smith, “The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837-1838,” *Pennsylvania History*, 65.3 (1998); and Alexander McClure, *Recollections of half a century* (New York: AMS Press, 1976[1902]). Useful city histories were: Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: a history of the city and its people, a record of 225 year* (S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, Philadelphia: 1912). John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time* (Leary Stuart and Co., Philadelphia: 1898).

## **Chapter Two: Election Day and ritual**

By Election Day, I mean the moment in which a vote occurs, when the declarations of individual citizens concerning their choice for political representative are sent out, accumulated, and then represented to them as a collective decision of the people. I will treat Election Day in the city of Philadelphia as an instance of a modern ritual, performed by a group of people who create themselves, through the performance of Election Day, as a modern democratic public. The importance of the Election Day ritual, for the purposes of this dissertation, is a particular message that this event sends: that message is the identity and the character of the public itself. Studying the history of Election Day from the point of view of a certain sub-set of the American public—the citizenry of Philadelphia—is therefore to study the changes in the way that this public has performed an image of itself, for itself, through the means of the democratic vote.

Part of the reason for engaging in this project is to present an alternative vision of the democratic public from that of thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas and others in his footsteps, who tend to define the modern public through reference either to forms of conversation—non-institutionalized discussions among members of the public—or through argument.<sup>1</sup> Seen from the viewpoint of the conversation or argument, a vote can only be a deficient form of communication. It lacks much if not all of the qualities of both: it is not dialogic, at least not in the usual understanding of the term. It is not subtle. It is not analytical. But I will argue that it is because of the very differences that a vote has with these other forms of democratic communication that it is essential to

the construction of a democratic public. The vote is not a deficient form of communication, rather it is communicating a different sort of message, one that may be especially well-suited to its characteristics.

In making this argument, I wish to provoke a re-evaluation both of the role of the democratic vote as an aspect of *popular* political communication, and the role of the political ritual or ceremony. In the past, political ceremonies have often been linked to the concepts of fascism or totalitarianism (especially drawing on the argument of Benjamin), or medieval, hierarchical polities (as in the work of Habermas).<sup>2</sup> What I want to argue here, in part, is that rituals and, by implication, other kinds of public ceremonies—spectacles, festivals, and contests<sup>3</sup>—are a necessary element to democratic life, as necessary as a free press, honest argument, and passionate discussions in coffee houses.

What I share with most of the writers just cited is the belief that for a public to act, it must first of all have a notion of itself *as a public*. An individual defines herself, as a person, through certain acts and statements she has made, as well as the internal communication she carries on within herself, and then proceeds to act from that understanding. A public defines itself through the common acts it undertakes and through the communication that it conducts.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the *style* in which public communication is conducted will play a role in deciding *what* that public is. But if this is the case, then it is important to have some sort of an understanding of what those styles are. By ignoring one important form of communication that goes into the making of the public, which it seems to me that as communication scholars we have

done, or to regard it as inherently undemocratic, then we must necessarily mistake the nature of the democratic public, its potentials and its problems.

One can think of any number of different ways to consider what a vote does. One can consider it from the viewpoint of the political system, for example, and ask how it contributes to the stability of the regime, and to its proper functioning, how it translates public opinion into effective policy. One can think about it from the viewpoint of social cohesion, and consider the way that the vote brings a population together via a shared symbolic act. One can think about it from the viewpoint of elite rule, and ask how a vote serves, in an unequal social structure, to deflect popular pressure or to structure it into safe (and perhaps ultimately political neutered) channels.<sup>5</sup> These are perfectly legitimate ways of thinking about elections and voting, but they are also incomplete. They look at the object from only one angle, so to speak. A metaphor for what I am trying to do here is to turn a piece of art—a small carving, for example—upside down, or look at it from the back, and then consider how this new perspective might add to one's knowledge about what it is and what it does, and what sorts of questions we can ask of it. I refer to this as the ritual perspective.<sup>6</sup>

The ritual perspective:

If public events are constructs that make order, then the logics of how they are put together is crucial to how they work,...To enter within such forms is to be captured by, and caught up within, the logic of their design—and so to be operated on by the event, regardless of why it came into being, or for whatever motives it is enacted.<sup>7</sup>

The ritual perspective on communication begins from the claim that social groups as such exist through the performance of rituals. Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle argue that ritual is: “memory inducing behavior that has the effect of preserving what is indispensable for the group.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, a ritual—which I will define presently—is not something that it would be good for a group to have, in order to aid in integration, or for members to become more fully human.<sup>9</sup> Rather that rituals are something that groups enact. All of them. Ritual, following Marvin and Ingle, provides an “indispensable” message, not merely an “important” one. For Marvin and Ingle, what is indispensable to the group is to be re-enact, in some fashion, the totem secret: the periodic bloodshed that recreates the borders of the group.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, what is indispensable about ritual is that it allows the members of the group to define themselves against other groups, to say, this is who we are, because this is what we do. This is not to argue that all rituals are good. Some may be, some may not be. Some may be better than others. But some form of ritual would seem to exist, in one form or another, across all cultures, in all times and places.<sup>11</sup>

From the ritual perspective, a Catholic is not a Catholic because she has faith in God, or has undergone a rebirth in Christ, or believes in the historical fact of the Resurrection. Many people share these experiences and beliefs, and yet are not Catholics (and it may be added, many publicly recognized Catholics may not share these experiences or beliefs). A Catholic is a Catholic because she goes to Mass, has been baptized in a Catholic church, has been confirmed in the faith by a Catholic priest. A member of the democratic public is not a member of the public simply

because he believes in the tenets of a constitution, or his rights to life, liberty, and happiness, or even because he talks about public matters. A member of the public is such to the extent that he participates in the rituals of citizenship—voting, attending party functions, watching the Inauguration on television or attending in person, or protesting the policies of the administration in a demonstration.

Rituals create groups because it is through rituals that societies or tribes or publics answer the most fundamental question that any group must answer: what it is. A ritual defines the group, first of all *corporeally*. Membership in the group comes about by virtue of participation in the group's rituals. Those who perform the ritual are members of the group. Those that do not, are not. Second, rituals define the *character* of the group, by the distinct manner in which they are performed. Catholics and Episcopalians do not celebrate Mass in the same way. The different manner in which the Mass is celebrated, along with the difference in performers who celebrate it, will create a different church. It is these differences in ritual acts and liturgy, as well as the fact that the performers of these rituals are different, that allow these groups to distinguish themselves from one another.<sup>12</sup> Here, I would note that one of the advantages of the vote or any other ritual, for the purposes of providing a clear, understandable image of the public—for the purposes of defining itself from other groups—is that it is so clearly and formally structured. It draws or creates very rigid and clear lines—between voter and non-voter, between winner and loser, between before and after, between public and private space, between members of different parties.



Democracies characterize themselves as such, both to themselves and to others, in part through the fact that they hold democratic votes for their leaders. In the United States and most other modern Western democracies, for a democratic vote to count as a vote, for it to be considered a proper vote at all, it must have certain generic qualities. It must first of all provide at least the opportunity for opposition. Moreover, it must establish a method of ensuring that the opposition forces are taken to be, at some level, legitimate players by the opposing side. That is, it must in some sense be a *contest* with prescribed rules. Secondly, it must provide citizens with an opportunity to consider and weigh the various options open to them. In other words, it must be preceded by a *campaign period*. Third, it must have a way of communicating the decisions of the various voting members of the public to a central organization that gather and count those messages. So it must have a *method of voting*, and a method of *accumulation*. Fourth, it must have a way of delivering the result back to the public. It must have some sort of *return*. It must have a way of *reintegrating* the competing forces that have resulted from the vote into a single whole, of convincing the losers to accept the result, if only by guaranteeing them that at some point in the future, they will be assured of competing anew. Finally, it must assure the public that the person who wins the election will wield a certain amount of power, as a result of this victory. That is, it must construct *political authority*. Above all this, it must find a way of assuring the public that each stage of the process was done in an appropriate and legitimate fashion.

All of these techniques for establishing the vote can be considered from the point of view of communication. That is, a campaign, a vote, a return, and the message of reconciliation, the legitimation of the whole process to the public, are communicative acts. In each case, there are a number of options open to a public for answering the necessary requirements. For example, a public vote and a secret ballot do not simply reflect different understandings of politics; they create different publics. A contest between individuals, as opposed to a contest between popular parties, also creates different images for the public of what it is. The specific manner in which the public chooses to perform each stage in the process will distinguish it from other democracies in both space and time. So too will the various communications that help to frame the context in which a vote occurs. I mean by this the method by which the press, for example, frames the vote, and the participants who perform it, but also other acts taken by the public itself on or near the date of the vote that help it to frame the event: parades, bonfires, Election Day bets. I will generally not concern myself with the question of the conduct of the campaign, or with the vote's changing role in creating political authority, except to the extent that these two elements help to frame what occurs on Election Day.

The modern mass media and national rituals:

Any discussion of a modern national ritual needs to address the role that the modern mass media plays in such rituals. In this dissertation, I am interested in four different ways by which the mass media—by this, I mean primarily but not

exclusively print and television—affect the meaning and the performance of Election Day. First, the media play the role of interpreter of the ritual; this is what Dayan and Katz call their *hermeneutic* function.<sup>13</sup> As interpreters, the media guide the public through the ritual process by explaining possibly arcane symbols or practices that might be encountered in the course of presenting a televised ceremony. They also provide a narrative frame that drapes over the whole of the ritual, in order to place it in a cultural context—the Royal Wedding as fairy tale, the victory of Jimmy Carter as the triumph of the outsider. The role that a medium plays as interpreter will change as its relationship to the ritual changes. Newspapers in the nineteenth century, as we will see, were more self-consciously aware of their partisan role in the construction of the Election Day ritual than the modern news media, who in contrast are more likely to put themselves forward as objective, disinterested interpreters of Election Day’s meaning.

The media also affect the *membership* of performers in the ritual. While it may be true that all ritual links performers to other members of the group, perhaps in space, but certainly over time, the rise of the modern mass media would seem to radically alter the manner in which performers understand these other groups in relation to themselves. A celebrant of a medieval Mass or Passover Seder would no doubt have been aware of the fact that she was performing the same ritual that countless, unknown others were performing in concert with her. However, she lacked any communicative medium that could readily allow her to coordinate her actions with these other members of this imagined group. The modern mass media do allow for such

coordination. Voters in Philadelphia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries went to the polls in the understanding that they were engaged in a common act with numerous other American citizens. Almost at the same moment that they themselves knew what they had done, they knew what these other groups had done as well. Thus the mass media could give a comprehensive, cogent portrayal of a national public performing a national ritual.

Related to this point is the change in the *performance space* that the mass media create. With the advent of the newspaper, a public event such as an election no longer happens in the center of the village or the market square. It takes place on a national stage, created by the media itself, of which the physical stage is only one part. To see the whole of the performance, one must turn to the journals or the television screen. In combination with the change in the group performing the ritual, the change in the space through which the ritual occurs creates the ability for a national public to see itself performing for itself. Thus it is the case that when the American mass media broadcast or report on a national ceremony or ritual—like the Super Bowl, or the Fourth of July—they often show clips from various parts of the country in order to present bodily images of the national public celebrating the event.

Finally, the mass media also change the character of the ritual itself in that they *replace* some forms of mediation with other forms. The mass media provide at least the possibility for a performer to watch or even perform a ritual without being in physical contact with other performers. This does not mean that the ritual is less real, but it presents certain difficulties, which arise in the first place from the fact that the

body remains the richest communicative tool in human experience. Any other medium will necessarily sacrifice some of the information that actual physical sensation will pick up. Electronic mass media try to counter this deficiency by providing an experience that physical presence cannot match: analysis, quick jumps from various stations or personalities in order to keep the viewer occupied, reports from various points in the physical performing space so that the viewer gets to see the “whole affair.” To a certain extent, television will also attempt to mitigate the viewer’s distance from the physical ceremonial space, by moving into it through stages—first the anchor, then the on-site reporter, then a feed from the performance site itself.<sup>14</sup>

What this argument suggests is that, because certain forms of media are better at presenting information in one style than another, they will emphasize that style, and perhaps through this emphasis suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that it is in some sense intrinsically better than another form of mediation. Moreover, the presentation of the information about the ritual in a certain way educates the audience to read it in that way. Both of these points will be important when we look at the role of the media in changing conceptions of Election Day.

#### Ritual as public event:

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will draw largely on the work of two different writers, Roy Rappaport and Catherine Bell, to define both what a ritual is and describe what it does. A ritual here is defined as a public performance of a sequence of *more or less* formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers, whose

fundamental efficacy lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in the world. The performance of Election Day seems to me to be captured in this definition.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most important elements of ritual is its character as a public event. A ritual is necessarily performed in public space, because otherwise it could not do what it needs to do, which is to provide an image for the public of itself. The publicness of the performance first of all acts as a kind of a guarantee. The fact that a person performs a ritual, and that I can see that she performs the ritual, means that I, as a fellow member of the group, know that she has accepted the ritual worldview as a legitimate one. Moreover, the performer herself knows that she has been observed, and that she is therefore considered trustworthy. The ritual performance also signals acceptance to the performer herself. By voting, and by accepting the results of a vote as legitimate, a citizen declares, to herself and to the rest of the world, that she is a member of the American public.<sup>16</sup>

When I say that rituals embody assumptions about the performers' place in the world, or that ritual performers accept the ritual worldview, I mean by this latter phrase certain moral claims about the world, at least as experienced from within the confines of the group. This is accomplished by the very fact that the performer engages in the ritual at all.<sup>17</sup> The performance of a democratic vote implies that the voter accepts this method as the legitimate way of choosing a political leader. That may seem a banal point, but it is nevertheless an important message to send to one's

neighbors, standing in line to wait with you to vote, if they wish to have some assurance that you will obey the laws set down by this leadership.

The publicness of the ritual performance is important for another reason, which relies upon an argument about how human beings understand themselves and the world around them. That argument is, we understand at least some social concepts best not by reading about them or about having them described to us but by performing them, either by ourselves or in concert with one another. “[E]very society,” in other words, “constructs itself from the bodies of its members.”<sup>18</sup> Ritual ceremonies require that the body itself engage in the actual performance of acts. That is to say, a ritual aims to teach us, not through instruction from a text only, but by having our bodies perform acts in a certain way. This is why the correct performance of a ritual, its formality, is so central to its character.

As this relates to democratic politics, the argument would run as follows. We understand democracy not by reading about it in civics class, but by performing it, either in ritual or in our daily lives. Holy or sacred texts also tell people about their place in a larger world. But the assumption of this dissertation is that if citizens understand democracy only through what they learn in civics class, or by reading a copy of the constitution, then they will have at best a rather desiccated vision of both democracy and of citizenship, and therefore one that is easily dispensed with.<sup>19</sup>

A final way in which the public nature of a ritual is important is that it provides a moment for reflection. One definition of cultural performances describes these events as “occasions in which as a culture we reflect upon and define ourselves,

dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.”<sup>20</sup> This is close to what I will argue about Election Day’s role in American political culture. Performers of a ritual may think about the ritual, and the group, and about what the performance of the ritual means for the group’s identity and character, in the performance of the ritual itself. At least some probably do. They certainly think about such matters before and after the event. Americans think a great deal and talk a great deal about elections and voting, and whether these are done correctly or could be done better, so as to make for a better, more healthy democracy. Performances that are carried out in private—whether this is in the privacy of one’s own home, or behind the closed doors of state institutions—do not allow for this sort of public reflection.

Conceiving the Election Day ritual as a form of social drama hopefully makes the questions I will ask about it clearer, but also highlights an important limitation of this work. Huizinga has noted an important element of *play*—which term I extend to the reflection of a public upon its public performances—is that it is in a sense self-contained. The *point* for players in a game, as for actors in a play, as for the audiences that view both, lies within the event itself. The interest in the event is in how well the various players perform their roles, the skills they display. At least in our formal roles as audience and players, we do not concern ourselves with the effects of this performance outside the realm of play.<sup>21</sup> But elections, along with marriage ceremonies, bar mitzvahs, knightings, etc., formally *act upon* the world. Elections create political authority, which in turn will enact certain policies, to either the



detriment or the benefit of the nation and the public. At least theoretically, it could be possible for an election to be satisfying for the performers of it, to deliver an important message to the performers and the audience as *play*, and yet not produce policies that lead to economic wealth, the improvement of the social welfare, or the protection of freedoms. This is precisely the argument that some make about the elections of nineteenth century America: that they worked well as political theater, not very well in other ways.<sup>22</sup>

To make the point clearer: the *population* of the performers on Election Day, and the *style* of that performance, will presumably have some effect on the *policies* that proceed from that performance. But what exactly that relationship might be is not an argument that this dissertation will answer.

Election Day's dual message:

Related to the notion of reflection over the ritual performance is the idea that rituals often send rather complicated messages that require some puzzling over. Earlier I claimed that one reason rituals are such valuable expressions of a group identity is that they are able to create distinct lines between social categories—between us vs. them, or between winner and loser. Rappaport's way of putting this is that rituals turn information that is inherently analogical, or fluid, (ex., public opinion) into binary information (a numerical vote count). It imposes unambiguous distinctions upon ambiguous differences.<sup>23</sup> When rituals cannot accomplish this task, they fail. The central reason that the 2000 Election was so spectacularly unsuccessful was that it

failed to provide the public with a clear message about who won, and who lost, the Presidential race.

But at another level, many ritual acts and symbols also embody or contain several meanings, and therefore their expression sends several messages at once. They are *multivocalic*. Turner found, for example, that the symbols of a coming of age rite for young women in Africa represented both concrete, natural concepts and more abstract, social ones.<sup>24</sup> The central figure of most Christian rituals is likewise said to be “the Word made Flesh.” It would seem that one reason for such symbols is that they may serve to express certain ambiguities or paradoxes of life as lived within the symbolic system of the group practicing the ritual, as Mary Douglas has suggested of symbols of defilement or danger.<sup>25</sup> Some rituals embody contradictory or ambiguous messages not only in their symbols but in their very structure. One example of this would be the ritual abasement of the king in Gluckman’s analysis of the south African *Ncwala* ritual, in which members of the group ritually insult the leader, then re-establish him as their leader at the end of the ritual.<sup>26</sup> Other rituals attempt to display, or perform, both a message of conflict and unity, or rather unity through conflict. Turner has created a general model of ritual based on such a principle, in which breach of the peace is followed by crisis, then redress, and then reintegration.<sup>27</sup> This could be applied to what happens in elections, and I would argue in an ever more concentrated form, on Election Day itself. At the beginning of the day, a breach occurs, in which members of the public separate themselves into warring factions, each supporting their own champion. Then a moment of crisis occurs, as the public awaits to see which

group has won the contest. Then a moment of redress, once the result is known, and the winner offers a peace to all of the American people, and finally, a moment of reintegration, as the following day, newspapers celebrate the fact of the ritual itself, and its importance in American life.

It is less important for me to fit Election Day into Turner's schema, however, than to point out this dual message that it sends about both division and unity. If a ritual allows a public to tell itself a vision of itself, then this aspect of the Election Day means that part of the public's character, as declared by the performance of the ritual, is this ability to reconcile the notion both that it is divided, but that it is through this very ability to reconcile these divisions that it achieves its unity.

Another way that Election Day delivers a dual message is in its treatment of equality. A democratic vote for President is in one sense a hierarchical event. I do not mean this in the sense that Presidential candidates are generally wealthy, and gain their support by appeals to the wealthy, and that their victory invariably means a victory for the ruling class. I mean that even were Americans to live in some utopia where money and social power were not allowed to influence the choice of political representative, Election Day would still have a hierarchical feel, because it would be, on one level, the victory of one man (perhaps some day one woman) over an opponent. If Hannah Arendt is correct, that politics is in its essence the display of excellence in the public arena, then the subject who displays excellence in an election would seem to be, on the surface at least, the candidate, not the democratic public.<sup>28</sup>

However, Election Day, as opposed to the rest of the election, is also a display of

political equality. A vote equalizes each citizen's voice. It declares that the candidate is in some sense at least *not* superior to the rest of the public, since he must defer to that public—that is, a group of equals—in order to lead them, or rather, represent their views. This contradictory message can be seen in the way that Americans talk about their President. Sometimes, he is taken to be the symbol of the nation itself, even “the leader of the free world.” At other times, he is reminded—or reminds himself, before the rest of the public—that he is no more than a “servant of the people.” As we will see, depending on the wider context in which it takes place, this message is negotiated differently. In colonial Pennsylvania, when candidates were taken to be the social superiors of the rest of the electorate, the need to “ask” voters for their votes, to demean oneself by performing a kind of dance of equality, even for only a day, was difficult for many politicians. The problem is rather different in modern America. Here the task is to prove to the electorate that one is *not* their superior, or at least, does not take oneself to be so.

Finally, the performance of Election Day sends a dual message about the democratic citizen. It requires, on one hand, that the citizen remove herself from her particular social position. In order to aid this task, the voter is placed in a completely private space, away from undue social, physical or psychological duress. This allows her to vote her conscience, to vote for that person she believes will best serve the common good of the public. At the same time, the act of voting, like any ritual act, is an event that a citizen undertakes only as a member of a defined social group. Moreover, as I have already argued, the fact that an Election Day, or any ritual, is a

public event goes to the heart of what it does as a form of communication. A ritual works—as a form of assurance between members of a public, as a way to understand politics on the part of the performers, and as a performance that can then serve for reflection—only to the extent that it *is* public. A completely private Election Day would not be a ritual at all. This suggests an inherent tension in terms of the modern American Election Day. To the extent that Election Day practices work to separate the voter from social pressure, then these practices seem to place him outside of the public. On the other hand, a vote delivered in full public view is suspect, because its integrity—its ability to symbolize the voter’s independent, honest opinion—is compromised.

I will argue in this dissertation that the manner in which Philadelphians have attempted to address these tensions—the tensions between difference and unity, the tension between equality and hierarchy, and the tension between individual and group—has changed over time. These different manners of negotiation, in turn, have meant for different sorts of publics enacted on that day.

There is one final tension within Election Day, of a somewhat different sort than the first three, since it refers not to the style of the day, but to the makeup of those who perform it. The very word “public” almost invariably has connotations of inclusiveness. The evolution of suffrage, from rather restrictive criteria to universal adult suffrage, is generally taken as progress, and a triumph for democratic ideals. Yet rituals are inherently exclusive. They would not be able to define the group if there was not outside group to use as a comparison. This may be one reason why elections

are rarely taken seriously as rituals. Rituals are what primitive, or at least pre-modern people, have. They exclude. They are the result of fear, and they result in oppression. And yet a democratic vote, as uncomfortable as it may be to say so, also excludes. Universal suffrage is really a misnomer, at least in the absence of a world government. Not everyone is allowed to vote in an election. Non-citizens are not. Children are not. The mad are not, nor are criminals and even ex-criminals in many jurisdictions.

But even this obvious point does not go far enough. If the actual performance of Election Day is one that defines the public image of itself for itself, then that public—that is, the public that actually performs Election Day, rather than one that *could* perform it, or *watches* it being performed—has never included, throughout the history both of Philadelphia and the United States, the whole of the people. It did not in 1740, it did not in 1882, and it does not now, when almost half the population manages to avoid going to the polls, and probably much less than half pays anything more than sporadic attention to the returns on television.<sup>29</sup>

It is this apparent lack of interest shown on Election Day by so many Americans, a lack of interest or engagement in one of the most important rituals that the nation has for defining its public, from which we will begin. What has happened to the Election Day ritual performance that it so evidently fails to stir so many people? The decline in voting among Americans has provoked a great deal of scholarly work, and rightly so, since the phenomenon throws some doubt on Election Day's implicit claim to be product of the accumulated decisions of all members of the public. The vote is the moment when the fiction of democracy—its claim to be a government of

the people, by the people—most closely approaches fact. It is the moment when a strong public, to use a phrase from Nancy Fraser, momentarily replaces the many weak publics that normally constitute modern democracies.<sup>30</sup> Thus the manner in which it is performed ought to provoke some concern, perhaps even more concern than there now is.

Beyond evidence of voting turnout, there is other, more qualitative evidence that something may be wrong with Election Day. That is the sometimes jaded, even cynical public discourse that surrounds what happens on the day. In the early 1800s, or at least so claimed city historian Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, Election Day was one of the major social days in the year for Philadelphians. A reporter for the *Philadelphia Daily Evening News* was so taken with the scene of the 1860 Election night that he wished an “American Hogarth” could be found to paint it. In 1940, hundreds of thousands of people streamed into the city’s downtown area to celebrate the third election victory of Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>31</sup> It is hard to imagine anything similar happening in Philadelphia, or indeed in any American city, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead, one reads statements like this this from a disillusioned young university student named Lisa Levenson, who wrote on *The Philadelphia Inquirer’s* op-ed page in November of 1996 that although she would be voting for President for the first time in her life, “it seems to me an inconsequential gesture.”<sup>32</sup> Voting, whatever else it might be, is certainly not an *inconsequential* gesture. Yet somehow many Americans, and not only Ms. Levenson, seem to have convinced themselves that it is.

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<sup>1</sup> "A portion of the public sphere is formed in every *conversation* in which private persons come together to form a public," Jürgen Habermas, "The public sphere," in *Rethinking popular culture: contemporary perspectives in cultural studies*, eds. Michael Schudson and Chandra Mukerji (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991). p. 398 (My italics). A fuller discussion of the normative importance of communicative action comes in Habermas, *The theory of communicative action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), see esp. vol. 1, pp. 42, 94-101; examples of other theorists who argue in this vein include Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt, the Liberal tradition, and Jürgen Habermas," in *Habermas and the public sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); also Bernard Manin, "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation," Jean-Marc Ferry, "Modernization and Consensus," and Jean-Marc Ferry, "Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary" all in *New French Thought: Political Philosophy*, ed. Mark Lilla (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Coming from a different tradition, but in keeping with the emphasis on conversation as the bedrock democratic form of communication is John Dewey, *The public and its problems* (Denver: A. Swallow, 1927). For earlier criticisms of this position, see John Durham Peters, "Distrust of representation: Habermas on the public sphere," *Media, culture and society*, 15(4) 1993; and Michael Schudson, "Why conversation is not the soul of democracy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14(4) 1997.

<sup>2</sup> See Habermas's discussion of "representative" publicity in "The public sphere," pp. 400, 403. Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," *Illuminations: essays and reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) pp. 240, 241.

<sup>3</sup> These various genres of public performance are discussed in John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the theory of spectacle in modern societies," in *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle: rehearsals toward a theory of cultural performance*, ed., John J. MacAloon, (Philadelphia: Institute for the study of Human Issues, 1984)

<sup>4</sup> "Society exists not only by transmission, communication, but it may be fairly said to exist in transmission, communication." John Dewey, *Democracy and education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> An example of the first perspective would be Juan Linz, "Some thoughts on Democracy and public opinion research," in *Election studies: what's their use?* eds. Elihu Katz and Yael Warshel (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); an example of the second would be James R. McLeod, "The sociodrama of Presidential Politics: rhetoric, ritual and power in the age of teledemocracy," *American Anthropologist*, 101(2) 1999; an example of the third would be Steven Lukes, "Political ritual and social integration," *Sociology*. 9 (2) 1975, pp. 304,305.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the ritual perspective as it relates to American elections and campaigns specifically, see Peter Simonson and Carolyn Marvin, "Voting alone: the decline of bodily mass communication and public sensationalism in Presidential Elections," especially pp. 10, 11, and 17. Manuscript version of paper. Cited with permission.

<sup>7</sup> Don Handelman, *Models and mirrors: towards an anthropology of public events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 16

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, *Blood sacrifice and the nation: totem ritual and the American flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Bell, in *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 253-267, critiques such a normative use of ritual.

<sup>10</sup> Marvin and Ingle, *Blood sacrifice and the nation*, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Douglas, in *Natural symbols: explorations in cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1982[1970]) presents a social typology that distinguishes groups, in part, on the degree to which they engage in ritual or ritual like activities. Douglas defines secular societies—by which she does *not* mean only modern Western nation-states—as groups that tend toward a paucity of ritual. Douglas even seems to suggest that at least some primitive groups—African pygmies, and Persian nomads known as the Basseri—have few if any rituals, pp. xi, 14, 15. But it may be that secular societies do not lack rituals, or rather some things that could be called rituals, only that they choose to call them by some other name. That is what I will argue here about elections, voting, and the performance of Election Day.



- <sup>12</sup> The distinctiveness of a particular nation or public's ritual in defining a sense of that public for itself is discussed in Roberto DaMatta, *Carnivals, rogues, and heroes: an interpretation of the Brazilian dilemma*, trans. John Drury (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) pp. 15, 16.
- <sup>13</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media events: the live broadcasting of history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) pp. 179-189.
- <sup>14</sup> Dayan and Katz, *Media events*, pp. 92-100; Dayan and Katz, "Electronic ceremonies: television performs a Royal Wedding," in *On signs*, Marshall Blonsky, ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) pp. 25-32.
- <sup>15</sup> See Catherine Bell, *Ritual*, p. xi; and Roy Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," in *Ecology, meaning, and religion* (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1979), p. 175.
- <sup>16</sup> See the discussion of ritual acceptance in Rappaport, "The obvious aspects of ritual," pp. 192-194; also Michael Suk-young Chwe, *Rational ritual: culture, coordination, and common knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- <sup>17</sup> Rappaport, "Obvious aspects of ritual," p. 193.
- <sup>18</sup> Marvin and Ingle, *Blood sacrifice and the nation state*, p. 4. See also Mary Douglas, *Natural symbols*, p. i.
- <sup>19</sup> See the claim of Michael Schudson, in *Good citizens & bad history: today's political ideals in historical perspective* (Middle Tennessee State University: Murfreesboro, TN, 2000), about the vote's role as a teacher of democratic experience, p. 12. For a fuller discussion of the role of the body in communication and cognition, see John O'Neill, *The communicative body: studies in communicative philosophy, politics, and sociology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989). See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in John J. MacAloon, "Introduction: cultural performances, cultural theory," in *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle*.
- <sup>21</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: a study of the play element in culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) pp. 8-10.
- <sup>22</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans still don't vote, and why politicians want it that way* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), pp. 49-55. Michael Schudson, *The good citizen: a history of American civic life* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) pp. 146, 147.
- <sup>23</sup> Rappaport. "The obvious aspects of ritual," p. 186. See also the discussion of Levi-Strauss's notion of ritual's "parceling out" ability, in Handelman, *Models and mirrors*, p. 9
- <sup>24</sup> Victor Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu ritual," in *Forest of symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 20-25, 50, 52.
- <sup>25</sup> Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge, 1996[1966])
- <sup>26</sup> Max Gluckman, "Rituals of rebellion in South-East Africa," in *Order and rebellion in tribal Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963) pp. 120-121, 128.
- <sup>27</sup> Turner, *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), p. 10.
- <sup>28</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959) pp. 48, 49.
- <sup>29</sup> For 2000 voting turnout figures in Pennsylvania and the United States, see the Federal Election Commission website, [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov). For television estimates of viewership, see Scott Stoessel, "Echo chamber of horrors," *The American Prospect*, 11(26) 2000, p. 21.
- <sup>30</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy," in *Habermas and the public sphere*, pp. 132-136. Fraser makes the distinction between opinion formation and policy decision. Strong publics feature both, weak publics only the latter.
- <sup>31</sup> Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: a history of the city and its people, a record of 225 years*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: J.S. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912) p. 80. "City Election," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Oct. 10, 1860, p. 8; "City's biggest crowd hails Roosevelt victory," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 1.
- <sup>32</sup> L. Levenson, "A first-time voter's take," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1996, p. A11.

### **Chapter Three: Election Day in colonial Philadelphia**

Several recent historical works on colonial politics, notably Alan Tully's argument about the formation of the American political culture and Richard Beeman's essay on deference and democracy in colonial America, would seem to make a case for Pennsylvania occupying a special place in the evolution of American political institutions and thought. In the arguments of both, Pennsylvania, along with a very few other states—Rhode Island in Beeman's case, New York in Tully's—seems to presage certain ways of thinking about popular politics that would become more widespread a century later. To put it in a manner consonant with this dissertation, Tully, Beeman—and to some extent Gary Nash in his study of protest politics in the eighteenth century—suggest a public that has certain important elements in common with later publics. Pennsylvanians, like other colonial Americans, lived in a world of socially deferent manners and public attitudes. However, popular representation, notions of political equality, and the rights of the people against those of its rulers played a much greater role in the public rhetoric of that province than it did in many other colonial publics.<sup>1</sup>

The question for us is how that self-understanding is communicated to members of the public. Various writers give various answers: a culture of working class radicalism,<sup>2</sup> the tradition of protest politics in the colonial port city,<sup>3</sup> popular participation in contested provincial elections,<sup>4</sup> and even the commonwealth's unique culture of drinking and the egalitarian sociability it implied.<sup>5</sup> The role of the act of

voting itself in transmitting a political understanding is rarely addressed. The exception here is Tully's work, but whereas Tully does mention some of the unique characteristics of Pennsylvania's vote and its Election Day,<sup>6</sup> he does not consider how, or whether, Election Day or the vote itself might be a *distinctive* manner of communicating politics. This is in contrast to work on Virginia's colonial election day, in which the experience of voting has been quite extensively covered, by Charles Sydnor, Rhys Isaac, Edmund Morgan, and Michael Schudson, among others.<sup>7</sup>

Virginia's Election Day, with its boozy electors, open air voting, and community celebrations, may be an especially dramatic example of how different a vote can be from the modern experience, and thus an especially attractive subject for historical work. What I try to argue in this chapter, however, is that Philadelphia's Election Day was just as much the performance of a political drama as Virginia's. It provided the political actors of that society with a unique set of political understandings and media forms in which to perform the image of the polity, a unique political ritual. This chapter, then, will be an examination of the various elements that went into creating an Election Day in the colony—the ballot, the press, the candidates and voters, the Election grounds. It would be these components, or variations of them, that a later revolutionary public would draw upon, to create a much different public.

#### The ballot:

The electors of Pennsylvania almost without exception voted by paper ballot. Each voter in the city of Philadelphia was allowed to bring several pieces of paper to

the voting window of the Court House—one containing up to eight names for Assembly representative, one for sheriff and coroner, and a third for commissioner and assessors, and one for the town burgesses. The voter would write the names on the inside of the ballot, the offices on the outside. Election officials would take the ballots and place them in the ballot box, and were forbidden to open them until the counting at the end of the day.<sup>8</sup>

The ballot was a break with the traditional English method of declaring one's choice in the open air before one's fellow citizens—known as *viva voce*—and was also different from the royal provinces in North America, including Pennsylvania's immediate neighbor to the north, New York.<sup>9</sup> Alan Tully has suggested that colonial Pennsylvanians had the closest thing to a secret ballot anywhere in the American colonies or the United States prior to the introduction of the Australian ballot in the late 1890s.<sup>10</sup> Although the ballot is now almost universally assumed to be the most democratic form of voting, in the 1700s that was not the case. Montesquieu for example, thought it a mean and vulgar practice that encouraged corruption among the lower classes, and argued that it eventually led to the destruction of the polity.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, as Tully has noted,<sup>12</sup> Pennsylvanians themselves took the secret ballot to be superior to *viva voce*:

The Law has directed the Election should be free, and for that end, has appointed Tickets roled up by the Elector, which no other has a right to inspect, before they are put into a Box, but those appointed as Judges; and they so far only as to see they be not double; which Priviledge every Elector ought to observe, and thereby be protected and enabled freely to Vote according to a good Conscience, always preferring the Public Good to any private Interest or Party, which will bring a

Blessing on them and their Posterity; otherwise the contrary will inevitably follow.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, a correspondent to the *Gazette* in the early 1770s called the ballot an “excellent mode of voting,” as it gave electors, especially working class ones, “an Opportunity, of acting agreeable to our Sentiment, without falling a Sacrifice to the Malevolence of those who may disapprove our Choice.”<sup>14</sup> As early as the 1690s, the province’s Governor noted that electors were jealous of the right to vote by ballot and generally insisted on it for Assembly elections.<sup>15</sup>

According to Cortland Bishop, the practice of using the ballot was probably influenced by contemporary Whig political theory.<sup>16</sup> William Penn was friends with Algernon Sidney and a reader of James Harrington, who developed a ballot system for his imaginary republic of *Oceana*, modeled on the Venetian practice.<sup>17</sup> There may have also been a religious connection. The other colonies that experimented with the ballot prior to the revolution were almost exclusively those where dissenting groups like the Quakers or Congregationalists held some political power—New England and the Carolinas for a time, New Jersey prior to its becoming a royal province<sup>18</sup>—and the use of the ballot has some structural affinities with Protestant views on prayer. In the case both of the secret ballot, and the prayer, there is little or no opportunity, at least in theory, for social hierarchy or for other members of the community to act as *mediators* of the message. The contents of the communication are a matter of individual conscience. It is in some sense the direct opposite of the ritualistic message, which gains its distinctiveness in part from the fact that it is *publicly* performed.<sup>19</sup>

But since a vote is also a public event—insofar as the vote itself concerns matters relating to all—its status is always problematic. While Pennsylvanians may have defended the secret ballot in theory, in practice many were often loath to leave the matter entirely in the hands of the free elector, and frequently attempted to circumvent the secrecy of the ballot, in at least two different ways. The more direct method was simply to confront any voter suspected of recalcitrance on the election grounds themselves. A pamphleteer of the 1720s remarked that one Election Day,

I must confess, I stood amazed at the *Tann'd* Impudence of a Fellow two years ago, who Stood upon the Stairs [of the Court House] with heaps of prepared Tickets; asked to see mine as I was going up; I was not forward to Shew it, but being between my Thumb and Fingers, he took it, look'd on't, and then told me it was not the right one, would have kept it, and offer'd me another, as it seems he had managed several. With some Trouble I got mine again, but so provoking was the Looby's conduct, that our Neighbour *Evan* (his blood being up) asked me, I did not spit in his face.<sup>20</sup>

Although such behavior may not have been common—the indignation of the writer argues against it—this was certainly not an isolated incident, particularly during those periods when party competition was keen and popular interest in the outcome high, and following the infamous 1742 Election Day riots, Richard Peters, in a letter to the Proprietor, noted with some heat that the “changing of men's tickets...had been a practice of which great Complaints were deservedly made.”<sup>21</sup>

Another manner of affecting the voter's decision was by “setting the ticket,” or creating a “slate” of candidates for the Assembly. The creation of party slates was in practice as early as 1711—probably before that—and by the 1720s seems to have been taken as a matter of course.<sup>22</sup> Slates of candidates were put forward to the public

sometimes through the course of campaigning and visiting potential voters, and later in the era by publicizing the names on partisan pamphlets.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most common and reliable method, however, was through spreading tickets and publicizing slates on Election Day itself. Especially near the end of the colonial era, political partisans and candidates assumed that it was their duty on Election Day to press their side's "Interest" onto voters, and often spent a great deal of energy going about the town and the place of Election itself either distributing tickets or publicizing slates.<sup>24</sup> Because city voters continued to write out their ballots, the grip of political organization was never fully secure on the electorate as a whole, and yet the patterns of voting that we observe at Philadelphia's elections suggest that full departures from the slate were relatively rare.<sup>25</sup>

The development of the ticket slates was seen as essential work on the part of party organizers,<sup>26</sup> and losses at the polls were sometimes attributed to a failure of industry on this score.<sup>27</sup> All the same, the idea of a small group of men making setting a slate stuck in the craw of some. "If we have not the Liberty of nominating such Persons whom we approve, our Freedom of voting is at an end," wrote BROTHER CHIP. "[O]ur Ballot is not worth throwing in on the Day of Election—the Gentlemen may do without us."<sup>28</sup> Another writer complained of Philadelphians that "we do not judge for *ourselves* at elections," but instead were led by bias and corrupt men practicing their arts on unsuspecting electors, "whom I would seriously advise, in future, to be watchful, and inspect every ticket they receive, that they may be fully ascertained of the particular names therein inserted."<sup>29</sup> Even so conservative a man as

the elder Isaac Norris complained of “the unhappy way that a man must have eight men crammed down his throat at once. And as the use of tickets is managed, a man cannot take and reject less than the whole.”<sup>30</sup> The development of the slate, in a less obvious but no less decisive manner than an actual confrontation on the Election grounds, struck at the heart of the ballot’s distinctiveness as a technology of political communication and representation.

#### The place of Election:

For most of the colonial era, Philadelphia’s elections were held the first of every October at the city Court House, which sat at the intersection of High (or Market) street and Second Street. Hard by were the market stalls, closed on Election Day so that the area could accommodate the numbers of voters and others who milled about the grounds in front of the polling booths during the day, keeping watch on the action.<sup>31</sup> Behind the Court House was the prison stockade, across the street the Friends’ Meeting House. Several taverns and inns were nearby, where candidates and other politicians sometimes waited throughout the day with their friends and supporters.<sup>32</sup>

The day would begin by the Sheriff ringing the bells or simply announcing from the balcony that the election was about to begin, sometimes using a mouth trumpet if the crowd was quite large.<sup>33</sup> Occasionally, other announcements might come at this time: a warning to keep the peace, or a message from the sheriff himself if he was not running for re-election, thanking the citizens for their past support.<sup>34</sup> The



next piece of business was to select election Inspectors, who would spend the day inside the courthouse and keep watch over the vote. Until the mid 1740s, this was done in the traditional manner, “by view.” That is, those who favored one Inspector or the other would move to the North or South of the Court House, and the sheriff would then determine which man obtained “a fair majority” of the votes.<sup>35</sup>

The Inspector’s duties were generally to make certain that the election ran fairly and efficiently and to “guard against tumult” on the day.<sup>36</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, however, the choice for Inspectors sometimes caused as much tumult as anything else. The legislature periodically complained about Inspector’s election, and continually fiddled with changes.<sup>37</sup> Because it was an open vote, taken on the grounds themselves, it was well nigh impossible for the sheriff to determine whether or not ineligible voters and non-freeman were taking part.<sup>38</sup> Also, if the grounds were crowded, it could be difficult for partisans to get to the side of the Court House that they needed to be on in order to select the Inspector of their choice.<sup>39</sup> (The office of the Inspector itself was a rather thankless task; since Inspectors were invariably linked to one party or another, their actions were always open to suspicion by the losers of a close election.<sup>40</sup>)

Once Inspectors were chosen then the Election could begin. The Court House, a two-story building with a balcony, and stairs on either side, was where the voting itself took place. As the main center of civic life in Philadelphia the Court House was the logical spot for an election. The vote was a public act, a public assertion of power on the part of the populace, and therefore required a method of making the

performance as broadly known as possible. Moreover, to the extent that the act of voting was also an act of *social distinction*, given that not everyone could vote, then the voters required others to take note of their status. In the late 1700s, an American observer to a British election, “judged there were assembled in the square, at the windows commanding a view of it, and in the adjacent streets, twenty thousand spectators, to witness *freemen* giving in their suffrages.”<sup>41</sup> Philadelphia’s Election Day audience would not have been so large, but given the location of the poll, it is probable that at least in closely contested elections, large numbers of both voters and non-voters were observers of the proceedings.<sup>42</sup> The central location of the courthouse gave Philadelphia’s voters both a stage and an audience for their performance.

However, whatever advantages it might have held as a public stage for the Election Day performance, this particular building also presented a problem to Philadelphia’s citizens, having to do with the building’s balcony and stairs. Voting would proceed by electors walking up one flight of stairs to deposit their ballots at polling windows, then walking down the other flight.<sup>43</sup> Since the stairs were the only way to get to the polls, they could easily become crowded. Sometimes, it took take as much as a quarter of an hour for a man to advance up the stairs to cast his vote, this after having made his way through the crowded grounds themselves. With a heavy election turnout, the slowness of the process could mean that the election might run until well into the next day, as men waited hours for their chance to vote.<sup>44</sup>

There was a more dramatic problem associated with the stairs’ restricted access, however. The person who controlled access to the stairs obviously controlled

access to the ballot box and therefore controlled access to political power. That certain citizens availed themselves of the possibilities afforded by the Court House architecture is evident in the account of the forced ticket-exchange above.<sup>45</sup> By the 1740s, “The Trial of the Stairs” was an expected part of Philadelphia’s Election Day experience, albeit grudgingly, and it played a role in the infamous 1742 Election Day riots. On that day, a group of about 50 sailors made two separate attacks on the electors of the city at the Court House, once during the election of Inspectors, and a second time as the voting had actually begun. During this second occasion the sailors, later assumed to be either in the pay of or encouraged by the leaders of the Proprietary faction, were observed to be making a special effort to take the stairs, knocking people down “in the most shocking manner Eye ever beheld.”<sup>46</sup>

That the stairs were part of what was behind the confrontational attitude of the Proprietary group on the day seems evident from several comments overheard by witnesses. “What could be expected but Disturbances, when such Rascals and Villains usually attended Elections crowding the Stairs, and hindering the People from giving their votes?” Mayor Clement Plumstead replied to Quaker partisans worried about the sailors early Election Day morning,<sup>47</sup> and a Proprietary supporter was later heard to declare: “The method of stopping the Stairs, used several Years past, is not right; You kept them last Year, but we will keep them this Year.”<sup>48</sup> Richard Peters charged that the Quaker party had taken control of the stairs every year since 1738, and even noted privately that some among the Proprietary faction had met as early as August to plan a method of securing them for the 1742 elections.<sup>49</sup>

Like the practice of setting party slates or exchanging tickets, the battles on the Court House stairs could be taken as a sort of refusal, on the part of certain members of the community, to concede that the act of voting on Election Day ought to be left completely in the hands of the individual conscience. It was an explicit and sometimes rather violent method for presenting an alternative meaning of the vote to the one embodied by the secret ballot: not the decision of the individual but of the group. Philadelphians got rid of the immediate problem presented by the stairs when they moved the election site to the new State House in 1766. That would not solve the larger question of what the vote ought to mean, and how the central political ritual ought to be practiced, however.<sup>50</sup>

#### The voter:

A voter in the city of Philadelphia in the 1700s needed to meet several basic criteria in order to be counted as such. He needed to own at least 50 pounds of property or 50 acres of land, ten of those cleared. He needed to be 21 years old, male, a natural born subject of the King or naturalized, and to have lived in the Province for a period of at least two years.<sup>51</sup> The justification for these restrictions in British legal traditions basically came down to the question of reliability, and autonomy. A freeman could be relied upon to take the care and time needed to make a good choice on Election Day because he had a stake in the community. If the community suffered, he suffered.<sup>52</sup> Also, his status as property owner meant that he could not easily be pressured upon to vote other than his conscience.<sup>53</sup>

Given this construction of the voter, the public act of casting a ballot was a performance of political subjectivity. It implied certain things about the performer. It implied that he was a loyal and honest subject. The fact that he could be trusted with a secret ballot further implied his personal integrity, the expectation that he would act in the best interests of the community without the need for further supervision. These things a Philadelphia voter declared, to himself and to those who watched him, when he cast his vote at the Court House balcony. Naturally, with this status came certain obligations. As the actual embodiment of the public, the voter was declaring not simply something about himself but about the public of which he was part.

This social construction of what the public act of an election meant, about what it implied about the voter as a political agent, took place within a wider set of cultural and political assumptions. At one level, Philadelphians lived in a world that historians have described as “deferential.” This world was conservative and hierarchical: it understood the social stratification of society to be a natural and just outcome of individual differences and inherent personal superiorities.<sup>54</sup> “One searches in vain for evidence that Pennsylvania was ever conceived as an economic or political democracy in nineteenth- or twentieth- century terms. Nothing could have been more natural than the transplanting of an ordered society where position and power resided in those whose stake in the venture was the largest.”<sup>55</sup> The political implications of such an understanding of the human condition were two-fold. First, society was taken to be an organic whole, with a single set of interests that could be discerned by the wise and virtuous. Second, the assumption was that the higher class of men rightfully should

take the lead in political and other affairs, and that the lower classes had a moral obligation to defer to the wisdom of their social betters in public matters.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the influence of radical political theory and his own Quaker background, William Penn's initial Frame of Government was not a democratic or even a very republican document, as Gary Nash notes, adding that Whig parliamentarian Algernon Sidney described the original frame as "the basest laws in the world, and not to be endured." Sidney thought that "even the Turk" was not more absolute than the Proprietor of Pennsylvania.<sup>57</sup> Penn himself often became exasperated with the political independence shown by the colonists, and early on chastised their Assembly's presumption to constitute the representatives of the people, apart from the Governor and Provincial Council.<sup>58</sup> Belief in the necessity and even desirability of a social hierarchy was evident not only in private correspondence between colonial leaders, but in popular public discourse. In a letter written to *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* in the early 1770s, one writer attacked mechanics who presumed to stake a claim to political leadership. Certain men were born to certain duties, "A Brother to the Brethren of the Chip" argued. Artisans were fit to create goods, and the wealthy and wise were fit to lead the government. The "Brother" ended with a quotation from Ecclesiastes to support his point.<sup>59</sup>

Such opinions were not simply the expression of wishful thinking on the part of men in power. It was evident in the performance of the vote as well. Wealthy merchants, professionals, and landowners overwhelmingly dominated the membership of the Assembly throughout the colonial period.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the most vivid illustration

of the extent to which Philadelphia's voters deferred to their social superiors on Election Day is that Benjamin Franklin was re-elected several times to the Assembly when he was a resident of England and therefore unable to serve.<sup>61</sup> The widespread use of tickets was also an indication of the power of the elite, since it was that group of men who generally set the slates of candidates, meeting in private clubs during the summer or early fall to discuss their choices and strategies.<sup>62</sup>

The dominance of the political class over what happened on Election Day was so great, in fact, some historians have argued colonial Pennsylvania's politics were essentially a game between two groups of the wealthy and high born, battling it out for political favors and power. In this understanding, the Election Day performance would be simply a public affirmation on the part of the lower classes of the right of colonial aristocracy to rule, and one could point to the large numbers of poorly or even non-contested elections to support that claim.<sup>63</sup> Later writers such as Richard Beeman have complicated that picture. If the assumptions of social deference were widespread and commonly voiced, so too was an alternative political vision, what we might call a republican discourse, which often competed with the deferential view in Pennsylvania's society.<sup>64</sup> This republican argument, combined, eventually, with even more radical, democratic claims, often found a counterpart in the behavior of Philadelphia's voters at the Court House square.

Part of the political schizophrenia of Pennsylvania politics can be traced back to Penn himself, who combined a paternalistic stance toward his colonists with more liberal political ideals. Beeman notes, for example, the clear presence of an "explicitly

popular vision” of political representation in the following passage by the colony’s founder:

The estate goes before the steward; the foundation before the house; people before their representatives; and the Creator before the creature...Every representative may be called the creature of the people, because the people make them, and to them they owe their being. Here is no transessentiating, or transubstantiating of being, from people to a representative; no more than there is an absolute transferring of title in a letter of attorney. The very term representative is enough to the contrary.<sup>65</sup>

Very quickly, Pennsylvanians began to take Penn up on the idea. Once of the first was David Lloyd, a Quaker lawyer and leader of the Assembly, who clashed with both the Proprietor and his governors for much of the early part of the eighteenth century.<sup>66</sup> Pennsylvanians may have been loyal subjects of the King and legally subservient to the Proprietor and his governor, but they were also Englishmen, and proud of their tradition of political freedoms. Partisan pamphlets of the 1720s argued for the rights of the Assembly and the people against the Governor. One writer gave his opinion that “Kings and Rulers were appointed for the good of the People; and can any Man tell me who is or can be a better Judge of the Peoples good, than they are themselves?”<sup>67</sup> Another was so bold as to complain that Pennsylvanians “groan under the Yoke of the most tyrannical Aristocracy in the world.”<sup>68</sup>

There are a number of plausible reasons for the popularity of such sentiments, including the spread of liberal political ideas, the lasting influence of Leveller thinking among many of the working class immigrants to the city and the province, and the generally anti-establishment attitudes of some sectors of the population, including the Scots-Irish, who brought a strong distaste for English landlords with them when they



crossed the ocean.<sup>69</sup> Add to this the relative freedoms that colonists enjoyed as a result of a relatively meager state infrastructure, and it should not be surprising that conservative politicians complained of elections that “were very mobbish, and carried by a Levelling spirit.”<sup>70</sup> A correspondent to *The American Weekly Mercury* cautioned readers “not to be too well dress’d on the First of October next, nor to put on an Air of Haughtiness and Defiance—There is a secret in it—A Man does not care to return home worse that he went out, nor to take Pains for nothing: A Beggar is willing to be call’d so if you give him Money; but a clear Coat will not bear a Bespattering, nor does a high Look easily brook a Humbling.”<sup>71</sup>

It is worth noting in this respect that economic restrictions on the franchise did not exclude as many of the city’s residents as conservatives no doubt would have liked. Charles Orton has argued that the decision to divorce the elector’s status from that of landowner allowed a great many of the city’s artisans and journeyman to legally cast a ballot, since for most of these men their tools alone were probably worth almost the required 50 £ of property, and the practical difficulties entailed in keeping ineligible voters from the polls meant that many men who did not formally meet the requirements probably voted in any case.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the single person who most vividly embodied the populist spirit latent in Philadelphia’s Election Day was Sir William Keith. A Scottish lord with suspected Jacobite sympathies, Keith had come to Pennsylvania originally as Penn’s governor in the late 1710s. In his battles with the conservative Assembly he came increasingly to turn to popular appeals. By the early 1720s had been dismissed from his post. A year

later he returned to the city and began to campaign for an Assembly seat, bringing with him a more elaborate and populist approach to electioneering, in the British style.<sup>73</sup> He helped to create two different political clubs, a Gentleman's club and the Apron Leather Club for tradesmen, which was often nicknamed the "Tiff" club in honor of its members' proclivities to heavy drinking. Among their other uses, these clubs helped develop and put forward slates of candidates for Election Day.<sup>74</sup>

Not surprisingly, the members of Pennsylvania's political establishment despised Keith. They distrusted his political ambitions, and they looked with horror on the effects his populist style had on Election Day behavior and the political culture generally. Keith's success at the polls was the occasion for riotous, drunken demonstrations, featuring "Mobs, Bonfires, Gunns, Huzzas—a Keith for ever."<sup>75</sup> On at least one occasion, a group of his supporters celebrated the election victory by pulling down the pillory stocks and butcher stalls outside the Court House.<sup>76</sup> In 1728, Keith's entrance into the Assembly several weeks after Election Day was marked with a parade of eighty horsemen—most of them, an opponent remarked, "made of Rags, Butchers, porters, & Tagrags"—with Keith at the head.<sup>77</sup>

Many of these features of the 1720s Election Day seem to have departed with Keith when he left for Britain at the end of the decade,<sup>78</sup> but the populist spirit and electioneering reappeared at occasional intervals, and the era as a whole shows a trend toward greater turnout percentages, a rise in party activity, and growing popular interest in elections.<sup>79</sup> With this change came a greater confidence on the part of the working classes, argues Olton. By the 1770s, the manufacturers, mechanics, and

journeymen artists of the city had created their own political clubs: unlike the Tiff club, these groups did not look to the sponsorship of an aristocratic patron, but created their own tickets.<sup>80</sup> Several artisans and mechanics ran for and were elected to city offices; at least one went to the Provincial Assembly.<sup>81</sup> In 1772, A MECHANIC mocked the calls of the conservative *Pacificus* for harmony and peace at elections. It was plain, the writer argued, that this *Pacificus* “views with Anguish of Soul the growing Interest and Importance of the worthy Mechanics and Manufacturers of this City.... and that their Spirit and Resolution, so vigorously exerted, at the last two Elections, was the first *Shock* that removed the *Mist* from his Eyes.”<sup>82</sup>

#### Candidates:

From what has already been said, it will be appreciated that a candidate’s role on Election Day was a difficult one to navigate. The dilemma is pointed out by Sister Joan Leonard with a quote by young Edward Shippen to his father, “It is a disagreeable task to appear to solicit for one’s self, but if ‘tis necessary I must submit.”<sup>83</sup> On the one hand, the traditional assumptions about the candidate’s social status, and his personal character as a sober, honest, and above all disinterested seeker after the public good, required a sense of decorum and a display of the social superiority he assumed by running for office.<sup>84</sup> Even journalists of a more popular bent ridiculed the open solicitation of votes on Election Day, for example.<sup>85</sup> Among those in the political class, examples of vote grubbing and electioneering were often adduced as evidence of an opponent’s meanness.<sup>86</sup> One’s friends, on the other hand, obtained success “without

the least pains or asking one man for his vote or being at the expence of one farthing.”<sup>87</sup> And yet, a man needed to get the votes to obtain the office. Sometimes, this required the implementation of the British tradition known as “treating:” ie., favoring the elector with a dram of whiskey or a glass of beer or even a small monetary gift in exchange for his vote. Treating would appear to have been somewhat commonly practiced by candidates for local offices such as sheriff and coroner. Candidates for the more prestigious Assembly seats, however, seem to have been more loath to practice it, or at least were more careful to avoid being seen doing so.<sup>88</sup> (The exception here was Keith. In the first three days of October of 1728, one journalist estimated, some 4500 gallons of beer were consumed in the city of Philadelphia.)<sup>89</sup> Similarly, whereas the practice of advertising for coroner or sheriff was common by the end of the 1750s, few if any Assembly members advertised. Most of the latter group used ads instead to inform electors that they did *not* wish to be re-elected.<sup>90</sup>

The informal bans on treating and advertising required the Assembly candidates to search for voters without appearing to do so. Leonard points out that one way to solve the dilemma was to exert oneself on Election Day for the interests of the slate and for other candidates, rather than oneself. By being active in this manner, the candidate could both keep up a public profile at the election site and assure his friends he was working for them (presumably with the understanding that they should return the favor), while at the same time giving an appearance of disinterest.<sup>91</sup> One did not press the interest out of personal motives, after all, but because these men were the

best hope for the people of Pennsylvania, the ones most likely to advance the public good.<sup>92</sup>

The key was to keep one's public dignity and honor intact in the face of the challenge presented by the democratic crowd. On the day of the 1764 election, following a campaign notable for its bitterness and abuse, Benjamin Franklin lost his re-election bid to the Assembly. Yet an admirer noted that "Mr. Franklin died like a philosopher," with little show of emotion or despair. This was in contrast to Franklin's compatriot on the Quaker ticket, Joseph Galloway, who "agonized in Death, like a Mortal Deist, who has no hopes of a Future Existence."<sup>93</sup> Election Day allowed the public to act as critics on the upper classes, to observe whether they were what they presented themselves to be. Following the 1742 riots Richard Peters noted disapprovingly in a letter to Thomas Penn that several young well-born supporters of the Quaker cause managed to enter the fray only after the battle was over: "to see those sons of wretches, men of remarkable pusillanimity lording it over the sailors who were pinioned in the custody of the Constables calling them vile names and beating them unmercifully, no man but what thought worse of them than the rioters."<sup>94</sup>

A far more damaging instance of bad behavior, however, was that of leaders of the Proprietary group during the same election: in particular, William Allen, city Recorder at the time and thus entrusted to help keep the peace, faced widespread criticism after the riots. Instead of taking preventative measures when confronted with early information about the sailors, Allen replied with counter-accusations about unnaturalized German voters. Moreover, during the first round of rioting, he and other

Proprietary leaders chose to look on and do nothing (they later defended themselves by observing that this was the course of action preferred by most of the rest of the city residents.)<sup>95</sup> Even Allen's sympathizers, while absolving him of blame in any charge of conspiracy with the sailors, later conceded that his performance on the day had damaged his cause generally.<sup>96</sup> The Proprietary group lost badly to their opponents, and Allen, who had been expected to win a seat, came in over a thousand votes lower than the lowest Quaker candidate. Numerous tickets were cast with his name scratched off.<sup>97</sup> Allen would not play a significant role in city politics for the next decade, and over twenty years after the riots Proprietary opponents still found the 1742 election useful in their election propaganda.<sup>98</sup>

#### Election Day and the role of party:

If politicians in colonial Pennsylvania could agree on anything, it was that party and faction was a sore on the body politic. This assumption came not just from political theory, but also from Quaker theology, which put a premium on social harmony.<sup>99</sup> Party was dangerous because it elevated private interest over public good, and introduced prejudice and passion over reasoned consideration. As a writer for *The Pennsylvania Gazette* put it: "A People is traveling *close to destruction*, when individuals consider *their* interests as *different* from those of the public."<sup>100</sup> Political journalists excoriated "the Rage and Wildness of Party," and noted its baneful effects on electors every October first.<sup>101</sup>

What is notable about these sentiments, aside from the consensus on the evil of political faction, is that they almost invariably came in the course of partisan attacks. While party was everywhere and always disavowed, Pennsylvanians could and did justify the honest defense of the country against its enemies. As one writer noted, “[w]ith regard to the approaching Election, I would only observe, that Unity and Peace are indeed desirable, but not at the Expense of *Liberty*: And since even the *Religion of Peace* exhorts us to contend earnestly for the Faith, ‘tis to be hoped a *moderate Contention*, for the Blessing next in value, will not be blameable...”<sup>102</sup>

At periodic moments throughout the colonial period, and increasingly as the century wore on, partisan battles were more or less openly declared. By the 1770s, Philadelphia had developed something like a nascent party organization. This can be tracked, for example, through the existence of political pamphlets. For the period running from 1705-1714, there were only two such pamphlets printed. In the years 1724 through 1734, there were 43. From 1755 to 1764 there were 109.<sup>103</sup> Another index of the institutionalization of the political contest is the existence of political advertisements for office. The first such advertisement in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* would seem to have been in the year 1744. By the early 1750s such ads were common, and by the late 1750s and early 1760s, the issue of the *Gazette* the week prior to the vote was regularly carrying upwards of 12 advertisements announcing candidacies for local offices.<sup>104</sup>

Partisan activity was noticeable as early as the 1708, when James Logan complained of the opposition’s Election Day activism in a letter to William Penn, and

hit its stride in the 1720s during the era of Sir William Keith.<sup>105</sup> It seems to have died down once Keith left, but if the complaints of Proprietary faction are anything to go by, had reappeared by the end of the decade.<sup>106</sup> Although often present throughout the year, in the form of pamphlets and partisan writings in newspapers, party was particularly noticeable on the day of the vote. Because of the particular cultural form it took, Philadelphia's Election Day did not see the disappearance of factional activity but rather its intensification. The effort put forth by partisans was one indication of this. Factional bickering and fighting on the grounds in front of the polls meant that an Election Day could often be a noisy and tumultuous affair. Henry Muhlenberg noted in one of his diary entries, "[t]his is turbulent day, for the citizens of Pennsylvania are electing their legislative government, and this seldom happens without altercations."<sup>107</sup> Besides the noise of partisan pleadings and treatings, there were pamphlets to be spread about, and broadsides to be pasted.<sup>108</sup> Election Day strategy also occasionally required an ability to mobilize voters quickly when the opportunity presented itself, and a sense of where and how to grab latent support. On the day of hotly contested 1764 election, there were so many voters that by midnight the Court House stairs were still crowded. At about 3 o'clock in the morning, the sheriff made a move to close the polls, "but (O! fatal mistake!) the old hands [ie., the Quaker group] kept it open." The opposition, alert to the change, dispatched couriers on foot and horseback to gather up more support.<sup>109</sup> From the time of the first call for closing to the end of the poll, at nine or ten the next morning, Charles Pettit estimated that anywhere from 700 to 800 additional votes had been cast, about 500 of them for the Proprietary side.<sup>110</sup>



Despite their best efforts, Philadelphians could not keep themselves from provoking each other during the election. Part of what brought the troops to battle was the diverse population of the city at the time, and the ability of an election to heighten differences among various ethnic groups and religious sects. An influx of second-wave immigration during the 1720s, bringing in large numbers of German speakers and Scots-Irish, meant that colonial Pennsylvania had one of the most diverse populations of any American colony, save New York.<sup>111</sup> Established residents were uneasy about the new arrivals, streaming into the country “like poles of shad.”<sup>112</sup> Isaac Norris, for one, worried about “the ordinary and Profligate” coming into the province, especially the Irish, “among whom a great part seem to be the very scum of Mankind.”<sup>113</sup> Already by the late 1600s, J.R. Pole has argued, Pennsylvanians were introducing changes into the voting laws to restrict the franchise to older and more established residents.<sup>114</sup> In 1728, Lt. Governor Patrick Gordon announced a law that would limit the “Crowds of Forreigners who are yearly pour’d in upon us.”<sup>115</sup> Worries about the Scots-Irish continued for several decades, Pole notes, and in the 1750s laws were passed restricting German immigration.<sup>116</sup>

The distrust that existed among various groups meant that political fights could be, and were, carried out along ethnic and religious lines. The two main factions were generally associated with religion: the Quakers (and affiliated German pacifist groups like the Mennonites) on the one hand, the Presbyterians (at least within the city itself) and Anglicans on the other.<sup>117</sup> Political propaganda often explicitly acknowledged this. Pamphlets supporting the old faction attacked Presbyterians,

Proprietary writers went after Quakers. Germans, who tended to switch sides throughout the period, were considered ignorant boors or honest yeoman, depending on the circumstances.<sup>118</sup>

Links to religion gave partisans a ready tool with which to organize and energize voters. The Quaker leadership was somewhat notorious for establishing their slates during the church's annual General Meeting, which brought in deputies from throughout the Province to a central location. Despite the explicit ban on political activity at these meetings, the opportunity and timing of the events—they took place in early September—evidently proved too tempting to pass up.<sup>119</sup> Presbyterian religious leaders worked more directly on their flock. An observer of the 1764 election noted that Presbyterian ministers “held Synods about the election, turned their pulpits into Ecclesiastical drums for politics and told their people to vote according as they directed them at the peril of their damnation.”<sup>120</sup> In the 1770s, William Goddard, publisher of *The Pennsylvania Chronicle*, advised those seeking office to “bellow loud, yes very loud...Against Bishops,” and further, “[d]on’t forget (...the never failing argument) to declare the kirk is in danger.” Such a strategy, Goddard wrote, would guarantee a candidate at least three to four hundred “Oliverian bigots” who could each be counted upon to vote three to four times.<sup>121</sup>

The extent to which such practices worked to bring voters to the polls is suggested by Muhlenberg's statement that on election eve in 1765, so many Germans had come to town to vote that his hall could barely contain them, and he had trouble reading over a copy of the Charter in German.<sup>122</sup> Muhlenberg himself saw the 1764

election largely along religious lines, noting after that vote that the Presbyterians, Anglicans and Lutherans had won the day, and that the Quakers, the Mennonites, and other dissenting groups had lost out; the next year he gave the victory to the Quakers, adding a suspicion that the other side had used foul means to carry their victory.<sup>123</sup>

The political strife provoked by the election had exactly the sort of divisive effect on the city that opponents of party feared. Because of their obvious differences with the established English population, both in terms of religion and of language, and perhaps also their unreliability, Germans especially were a favorite target for attack on Election Day. Often, this would take the form of accusations that they voted illegally. A 1765 letter from a party organizer in Philadelphia to one in Lancaster County warned about the large numbers of un-naturalized Mennonites that (the writer expected) would swarm the polls in favor of the opposition. To guard against the possibility, it was suggested to publicize that “all of our party intend to come well-armed to the Election and that you intend if there’s the least partiality in either Sheriff, Inspectors or Managers of the Election that you will thrash every Inspector Quaker & Menonist to Jelly.” Every man ought to be provided with a “good Shilely” club, and potential frauds would be informed that any man trying to vote more than once would be “that moment deliver[ed] up to the Mob to chastise him.” Such threats would be sure to dissuade the Mennonite voters, the writer assured, not one third of whom were naturalized.<sup>124</sup> University of Pennsylvania rector William Smith was so angered at the way the “uncultivated Race of *Germans*” unthinkingly supported the opposition in the 1750s, he recommended removing their right to vote and outlawing their press (the

German journalist Christopher Sauer was credited with an almost preternatural ability to stir his countrymen).<sup>125</sup> A writer of the 1730s, evidently referring to the German presence on Election Day, noted that in Britain foreigners were forbidden to vote, adding, “we have sufficient marks, to distinguish our Foes from our Friends.”<sup>126</sup>

One did not have to be a German speaker, however, to have one’s status called into question. Losers especially were fond of raising doubts about the legitimacy of opposition voters. After failing in his 1764 re-election bid, for example, Benjamin Franklin fumed over the various tricks that opposition had played on election, including the “many Perjuries procured among the wretched Rabble brought to swear themselves intitled to a Vote.” Despite this, Franklin noted, “Your Artifices did not prevail every where; nor your double Tickets, and whole Boxes of forged Votes.”<sup>127</sup> The next year, a Quaker partisan credited his side’s victory in a smaller, run-off election to the fact that there was “a better opportunity of Scrutinizing into the Quality of those who offered to vote: for the Presbyterians used very step in their Power to secure this Election, but in Vain.”<sup>128</sup> In an earlier era, Quaker leaders had countered the accusations against their German voters in the 1742 election with the charge that the other side had in the past brought ineligible tenants to the election site to vote.<sup>129</sup>

Laments about the tense, uncomfortable atmosphere provoked by elections were frequently voiced. During the 1764 election, a pamphleteer remarked how “[n]eighbours, who from their Infancy, lived in the greatest Harmony, cannot now spend an agreeable Evening together.”<sup>130</sup> An earlier journalist had already noted something like the same effect. “You well know, my loving Countrymen, that you are

most of you very warm & active this Time of the Year; Your feeling is at its greatest Perfection: An Affront now is given and taken in a minute, which two Months ago, or two Months hence, would take an hour.” In order to counter the effects while the election continued, the writer recommended his readers cultivate a studied “dullness” in speech and manner, avoid drink, and sleep a great deal more than usual.<sup>131</sup>

#### Election Day and the media:

Beyond the experience of the vote itself, colonial Philadelphians communicated the Election Day experience to themselves through three different forms of media: letters, pamphlets and broadsides, and newspapers. These forms were related institutionally. As a clearing-house for information, the post office was often the location as well of a newspaper, and newspaper publishers like Benjamin Franklin, in turn, often printed pamphlets.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, each of these forms of mediated expression displayed somewhat different characteristics; thus each played a different role in explaining, interpreting, and framing the Election Day experience of the age.

As a way to link the political class to one another throughout the province, letters created a public that was in some sense much different than the public of Election Day. The privacy they afforded gave them certain advantages over the more public forms of written expression. Along with such practices as the Quaker general meeting or the private club, the letter was a valuable method of organizing party strategy and coordination, allowing Pennsylvania’s factional leaders to openly express partisan attitudes to close associates, while publicly disavowing party designs and

continue their expressed allegiance to the notion of a single unified public.<sup>133</sup> Letters also gave party leaders opportunity to give voice to elitist attitudes about the electorate that might have seemed out of place in open public discourse, and thus cultivated a sense of political leadership and identity distinct from the larger public.<sup>134</sup>

The primary role of the pamphlet in the colonial political culture was as a partisan tool to put forward party positions and, especially, to attack opponents. Pamphlets were used by political groups as early as 1711, and ample use was made of them by both sides during the Keithian era of the 1720s.<sup>135</sup> But while pamphlets were used as electioneering tools throughout the century, pamphleteers came into their own with the hard fought 1764 campaign. It was during this later period when men like David Dove made a career of pamphleteering, hiring out their services to each side.<sup>136</sup> Pamphleteers were often brutal in their behavior toward the opposition.<sup>137</sup> Franklin's opponents were so severe in the course of the 1764—accusing him, among other things, of fathering a bastard child and allowing the mother to starve—that, Phillip Gleason has argued, they affected his public reputation for the rest of his life, and even influenced historians.<sup>138</sup>

The pamphlet or broadside had a number of advantages over other forms of communication. It was a relatively inexpensive way to get a message out to large numbers in the electorate. A run of several thousand pamphlets, Nash notes, might cost the writer around 5 £, and could be passed among readers.<sup>139</sup> Broadside were especially effective ways of putting forth one's candidacy on Election Day for those who lacked the resources of a party organization. For example, a broadside allowed

the engraver Robert Kennedy to make his case to his fellow tradesmen in 1770 as a way to avoid the “prospect of approaching Indigence to myself and tender offspring.”<sup>140</sup>

The direct influence of pamphleteers on the Election Day ritual was in terms of framing it as a contest. As campaign instruments, pamphlets created an environment in which differences within the body politic were made explicit, and along the way implicitly challenged the assumption of moral superiority of members of the ruling class, who were regularly traduced by pamphlet writers of both sides. Their structural equivalent in the modern age would probably be the party advertisement, and like attack ads, pamphlet attacks often provoked complaints about the low character of electoral politics.<sup>141</sup>

The newspaper’s role in the election was rather different, and in a vague sense less directly partisan. The newspaper helped create the public by joining it into a common act—the act of the reading the news—and then linking this community of readers to an outside world, through the reporting of the election results.<sup>142</sup> Newspapers also presented a popular, consensual image of what Election Day *ought* to look like. Journalists commonly defended general principles—the need to keep the public good always in mind, to disavow faction, to pay little heed to the tumult surrounding the election—and to express support for shared political values—social harmony, freedom, the dangers of tyranny—so that editions prior to the first of October would often feature a column, or poem, or letter from a writer calling on the

readership to avoid party strife, boorish behavior, and the demands of the ticket hawkers and make their choices instead based on their own reason and observation.<sup>143</sup>

Nonetheless, compared to the role that the mass media would play in later constructions of Election Day, the colonial press can seem somewhat muted in its stance toward the event. Often, *The American Weekly Mercury* or *The Pennsylvania Gazette* of the 1730s and 1740s would carry no information at all about the election except the results of the vote, which themselves were often introduced in a relatively pedestrian manner: “Thursday last being the anniversary Election, throughout the Province, for Representatives, Sheriffs, Coroners, etc., etc., The following Gentlemen were chosen for the following counties, viz.” This would be followed by list of the successful candidates, and only very rarely a remark about Election Day itself.<sup>144</sup> One year, the editor of the *Weekly Mercury*, Andrew Bradford, noted the great deal of activity about the election grounds; another year, Franklin’s *Gazette* followed the list of successful Assembly with a note about how many were Quakers, and how many were not.<sup>145</sup> Generally, however, even this much direct commentary was excluded. There was no coverage of the 1742 riots in the *Weekly Mercury*, for example, although the *Gazette* did have a story.<sup>146</sup>

In other words, journalists in this period rarely took on the role of analyst of Election Day. Thomas Leonard has argued the colonial period in the United States was the moment when the printed press began to assume the role of interpreter of public events for its readership.<sup>147</sup> As regards Election Day, Philadelphia’s colonial journalists provided their readers with an interpretation of what Election Day *ought* to



be, but were less comfortable acting as expert commentators on the event's actual results. There are a number of explanations for this. First, analysis of a political event like the election would create controversy, and perhaps lose the paper readership or even get the editor into trouble with the authorities.<sup>148</sup> Second, the institutional role of the newspaper was still in its infancy, as was partisan warfare: "colonies did not have the patrons for writers and traditions in quarrels that could nurture political advocacy."<sup>149</sup> Journalists were still working their way towards an understanding of what their role in politics should be. The general consensus against party and faction also probably had an influence. Analysis of the day would have meant publicly and explicitly acknowledging the presence of party, which would have gone against the ideological understanding of the vote as an expression of the unified public.

When the writers did refer to *Pennsylvania's* electoral politics, it was generally either in general terms—concerning the proper behavior on the election grounds, for example—or it dealt with it in a vague and allusive style. Like political correspondents themselves, until the 1760s candidates were almost never referred to by name; even factions or parties were rarely addressed explicitly. Instead, a writer might mention the need to guard against any candidate who might give evidence of being an "*ambitious ringleader*," or a "*selfish and designing Man*," (this coming during the period of Keith's political ascendancy),<sup>150</sup> or defend one I—N—, a member of the assembly (Isaac Norris) from attacks made on him by his opponents.<sup>151</sup> Political electioneering was written in a sort of code. As Barnhurst and Nerone point out, it is often difficult for the modern reader to understand who exactly is being attacked or defended in

broad­sides or journalistic attacks, because of the use of nicknames and allusions (classical or contemporary), and the contextual information that is assumed.<sup>152</sup> They add that this difficulty was probably not an accidental by-product of journalistic style. The upper middle-classes of the colonial cities *did not want* their information read and understood by just everyone.<sup>153</sup> Thus the lack of interest shown by the newspaper in the Election Day results, or in the interpretation of them, makes some sense. Newspapers would not have wanted to explain to the general public how the election results were likely to affect the politics of the province for the coming year. That was not information that the common man, in the opinion of the newspaper's public, needed to know.

The relative lack of newspaper commentary on Election Day is important because it is so clearly different from what will come after it. Almost immediately following the revolution, as we will see, the press become much more involved in discussions of Election Day. They also become more important and explicit tools in the partisan fight. Once Election Day becomes a national rather than a local event, the role of a medium such as print necessarily figured more centrally into the way that it is communicated.

### Conclusion:

The annual ritual of casting the vote on the balcony of their Court House every October created a representative body of Philadelphians, and through this, provided them with a portrait of themselves as a political entity. It established the public as a

social fact by embodying it, and for this reason political writers continually stressed the importance of what happened that day, and tried to instill in their readers the need to perform the event correctly. The voter was acting not simply for himself but for the polity as a whole. Thus, to cast one's vote wisely and well was "one of the most important things to the Good of the Publick."<sup>154</sup> Each free man's vote, was "his country due:/ Which his own reason should direct him to."<sup>155</sup> The correct performance in the matter of the vote would lead to good governance, whereas poor choices, choices that resulted from selfish partisan passions or a simple lack of due consideration, would lead to corruption in the polity itself. "This matter is too weighty for a Jest."<sup>156</sup>

As a portrait of the public, drawn by and for the people themselves, Election Day really provided two different images. The first existed in the more optimistic passages of political rhetoric, both popular and elite, of the age. That portrait was of a group of independent-minded, well-meaning, sober, and honest freeman peaceably walking up to the Court House steps every year and casting their ballots. Without coercion, these electors had all, simultaneously, arrived at a common decision of which group of men ought to represent their views to the government for the next year. Assemblymen were chosen without effort on their part. Their success came not because they wished for political honors but because their general excellence had recommended them for the office. Party divisions and electioneering did not exist because the choices for representative were obvious to all good and reasonable men. Election Day was thus a portrait of social harmony, of personal independence existing

alongside a proper respect for authority and social hierarchy, and evidence of the general wisdom of the people of Philadelphia. Its leaders were excellent and honorable men, interested not in private gain but in the common weal. Its citizens were wise, free, and well behaved. The pride citizens took in their annual ritual, their belief in its distinctiveness and superiority to the rest of the English world, comes through in this passage from the provincial Assembly, during one of their periodic disputes with their Governor.

He [Governor Morris] affects to consider us as a permanent Body, or some particular Order of People in the state, capable of planning and scheming for their own particular Advantage, distinct from that of the Province in general. How groundless this must be, is easily conceived, when 'tis considered, that we are pick'd out from among the People, by their Suffrages; to represent them for one Year only; which ended, we return again among the People, and others may be and often are, chosen in our Places. No one of us knows a Day before the Election that he shall be chosen, and we neither bribe nor solicit the Voters, but every one votes as he pleases, and as privately as he pleases, the Election being by written Tickets folded up and put into a Box. What Interest can such a Body have, separate from that of a Publick? What Schemes can a sett of Men, continually changing, have, or what plans can they form to continually aggrandize themselves,...if any of us had such Schemes, the Want of a single Vote in any election might totally disconcert them, there being no tenure more precarious than that by popular Esteem or Favour.<sup>157</sup>

Although a portrait of utopia, something approaching this sort of scene may in fact have often been performed on Philadelphia's Election Day during the colonial period. Concerning those many election days that did not cause public controversy and comment, we can assume this was in part because the performance of the citizens in fact was close enough to the portrait just presented that it did not become a scandal. True enough, it was these unremarkable Election Days that often drew the fewest

voters, but low turnouts did not bother colonial Philadelphians as they did their republican and democratic descendants.<sup>158</sup>

What did bother them was the boorish behavior often exhibited on the day, the ignoble chasing after votes on the part of supposedly superior men, the way that ethnic and religious prejudice insinuated itself into men's actions, and above all the spirit of partisanship so clearly evident. At one point James Logan wrote somewhat disgustedly that,

I go to Elections, because I think it my Duty, but confess my self almost tired of it—To see the vile Abuses of our Rights and Liberties, and how easily the better and most modest of our People give into it. Many of them seem to think and act as if a Set of burly Fellows were appointed by Law to make the Tickets, and the People had only a Right to choose which they liked best: The worthiest Men these People know to be the most Modest and Decent in their Behaviour, and make advantage of it, by timely Provision, Clamour, Noise and Impudence.<sup>159</sup>

Conservatives like Logan distrusted Election Day because of the way it provoked the general populace and disturbed the social order. Republicans complained about “caballers,” by whom “private acts are made, A Part attempted and the whole betray'd.” More radical citizens complained of small groups of men presuming to decide for the people, and of the people's lack of spirit in opposing them.<sup>160</sup> This problematic image of themselves was one Election Day too often, and increasingly, painted of the Philadelphia public. It was a public that hoped for unity but continually created divisions within itself, that boasted of its love of freedom but constantly seemed ready to defer to the dictates of party and political leadership. It was a public in which many men began to suspect that the triumph too often seemed to go to the

loudest, the most arrogant and brash, or the most servile, rather than the wisest and the most trustworthy.

The distance between utopia and reality was communicated through various means. There was above all the actual physical performance of vote on Election Day. There, interested residents could observe for themselves the battles for the stairs, the electioneering, the treating, the spectacle of the freemen delivering their ballots to the voting windows, the occasional cheers and celebrations when the results of a particularly contested election were announced. But the performance was also communicated via printed mass media and the postal system, where Philadelphians critiqued their performance, raised doubts about its propriety and suggestions as to how it could be improved. It was in these forums that Philadelphians created an interpretation of what the Election Day ritual meant, and began a long tradition of worrying over whether the public that *really* performed Election Day was similar enough to the one that *should* perform it. These worries would become a tradition in themselves, and perhaps Election Day's most significant effect on that public.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Tully, *Forming American politics: ideals, interests, and institutions in colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, 1994); Richard R. Beeman, "Deference, republicanism, and the emergence of popular politics in eighteenth-century America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 49(3) 1992, pp. 401-30. Gary Nash, *The urban crucible: social change, political consciousness, and the origins of the American revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1979)

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Schulz, *The republic of labor: Philadelphia artisans and the politics of class, 1720-1830* (New York: Oxford, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> Nash, *The urban crucible*; Sister Joan de Lourdes Leonard, "Elections in colonial Pennsylvania," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 11(3) 1954, *Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999), pp. 605-32.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Nash, "The transformation of urban politics; 1700-1765," *Journal of American History*, 60 (3) 1973.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Thompson, *Rum-punch and revolution: taverngoing and public life in eighteenth-century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999)

<sup>6</sup> Tully, *Forming American politics*, pp. 341-46. Tully's discussion of New York is far more extensive than his discussion of Pennsylvania. New York, like Virginia, had a *viva voce* system.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Sydnor, *Gentlemen freeholders: political practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1952); Rhys Isaac, *The transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982) pp. 110-114; Isaac, "Dramatizing the Ideology of Revolution: Popular Mobilization in Virginia, 1774 to 1776," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 33.3 (1976) pp. 376, 377; Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the people: the rise of popular sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988) pp. 184, 185; Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 20-23.

<sup>8</sup> For descriptions of the voting process see "A supplementary Act, 1722," vol. 3, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1809*, ed. James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders (Harrisburg, PA: np, 1896) p. 296, 297; also Sect. II. "An Act Amending the Several Acts," 1745-46, vol. 5, *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1809*, p. 18 (hereafter *PA Statutes*); and Lewis Evans, *A Brief Account of Pennsylvania: in a letter to Richard Peters, Esq., in answer to some queries of a gentleman in Europe*. 1753. p. 24, Manuscript Collection, HSP (source cited in Tully, *Forming American Politics*, p. 530). The several tickets meant that it was legally possible for a voter to go to the polls several times in the day to vote. Although there is little evidence this was a common affair, in 1764, Henry Muhlenberg cast a vote in the morning for Assembly representative and in the evening for the town burgesses: *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium and The Muhlenberg Press, 1958) pp. 122, 123. (Source cited in Nash, "Transformation of urban politics," p. 629.)

<sup>9</sup> Cortlandt F. Bishop, *History of Elections in the American Colonies* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), pp. 140-175.

<sup>10</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, p. 347. For this reason, perhaps, there is little evidence that of Pennsylvania landlords ordering their tenants to vote a certain way, as was the practice in New York, *ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>11</sup> Charles de Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws*, trans. and eds., Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone, volume one, (Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press: 1989), part 1, book 2, section 2, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, p. 529.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Veritt, *To my Friends in Pensilvania*, (Philadelphia: np, 1783[?]) p. 3. Collection of the Historical Society of New York. (Source cited in Tully, *Forming American Politics*, p. 529.)

<sup>14</sup> A BROTHER CHIP, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1770, p. 3. Hereafter *PA Gazette*. Cited in Charles S. Olton, *Artisans for Independence, Philadelphia mechanics and the American Revolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1975) p. 134

<sup>15</sup> In a 1689 controversy over the election of several assembly members from Philadelphia county, the governor noted with some surprise that residents had not used the ballot in this matter, since "they had always heretofore insisted upon it as their Right." (The decision to forgoe the ballot in this case seems to have been provoked by the citizens' desire to send a public message to the governor, who had refused the election of the two members, Samuel Richardson and John Eckley). *Pennsylvania Colonial Records*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, Joseph Severns and Company: 1852), p. 282. James Logan mentions the use of the ballot on Philadelphia's election in a 1705 election: James Logan to William Penn, Oct. 24, 1705. *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan, 1700-1750*, vol. II (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1872) p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Bishop, *History of Elections*, p. 167. This influence might explain why the colonists, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, sometimes used colored balls or beans to vote instead of paper (Venetians used balls ("ballot" in Italian), and this was Harrington's method.) See *Colonial records of Pennsylvania*, vol. 1, p. 279, also Leonard, "Colonial Elections in PA," p. 392, note 33, for mentions of Pennsylvania cases: there is little evidence that this method was common in Philadelphia, certainly not after the beginning of the eighteenth century.

<sup>17</sup> Harrington's discussion of the ballot is in James Harrington, *The commonwealth of Oceana; and, a system of politics*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a discussion of Penn's political theory and the clash with political reality see J.R. Pole, *Political representation in*

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*England and the origins of the American Revolution* (Macmillan, St. Martin's: London, New York, 1966) pp. 76-93.

<sup>18</sup> Bishop, *History of elections*, *op cit*.

<sup>19</sup> Rappaport, *op cit*.

<sup>20</sup> *Dialogue Shewing, What's therein to be found*, Philadelphia, 1725, (Early American Imprints, First Series. American Antiquarian Society, general editors. Evans No. 2652. Hereafter referred to by the Evans numbers of the document) p. 30. Cited in both Tully, *Forming American politics*, p. 346, and Leonard, "Elections in colonial Pennsylvania," p. 394.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, Nov. 17, 1742. *Peters Letter Book*, Richard Peter's Papers, 1739-1743, p. 138, HSP. (Source cited in Thompson, *Rumpunch and revolution*, p.132) See also the quoted remarks of Mayor Clement Plumstead in the testimony of Anthony Morris, in evidence about the riots before the Assembly: "Appendix: containing the depositions concerning the riot at the election." *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Archives*, Eighth Series, ed. Gertrude McKinney, vol. 4. (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania, 1931) p. 2960. Hereafter referred to as *PA Votes*. Also Leonard, "Elections in colonial Pennsylvania," p. 394.

<sup>22</sup> Isaac Norris to James Logan, Oct. 13, 1711. *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan, 1700-1750*, vol. II (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1872) p. 458. See letter of Isaac Norris, Jr., to Robert Charles letter, Oct. 11, 1740, Isaac Norris Letterbook, 1719-1756, *Norris Collection*, HSP, p. 3; and letter of James Burd to Samuel Purviance, Sept. 17, 1764, *Shippen Papers*, vol. 6, HSP, p. 109. Both sources cited in Leonard, "Colonial Elections in PA," pp. 388, 390

<sup>23</sup> An instance of the earlier practice is mentioned in Timothy Telltruth, *To Morris Morris, on the Reasons published for his Conduct in Assembly*, July 16, 1728 (Evans 3111) p.1 (source cited in Thomas Wendel, "The Keith-Lloyd Alliance: factional and coalition politics in colonial PA," *PMH&B*, 92(3) 1968 p. 303), and the letter from Norris to Charles, Oct. 11, 1740, p. 2. An example of the latter can be found in the pamphlet, *To the Freemen of Pennsylvania*, Sept. 28, 1764, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 11, p. 364, and in a broadside of the era: John Dickinson, *Fellow Citizens and countrymen*, Oct. 1, 1772: Philadelphia, (Evans 42363). The latter work asks that the reader "will please to write a few spare tickets, to furnish his Friends with," as none are wrote to be delivered at the State-House.

<sup>24</sup> Discussions of this sort of activity can be found in a letter from Charles Pettit to Joseph Reed, Nov. 3, 1764, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, ed. William B. Reed, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blackiston, 1847) p. 36 (source cited in Beeman, "Deference and republicanism," p. 426); James Logan to William Penn, Oct. 20, 1706, *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan*, vol. II, p. 188. In *To the Freeholders and other Electors, of ASSEMBLY-MEN for PENNSYLVANIA*, Philadelphia, 1765 (Evans 10184) p. 1, the writer defends Benjamin Franklin against charges that he is anti-German by reminding readers he was one of the most "active" on the Election grounds when the son of a German was chosen sheriff for the first time.

<sup>25</sup> For a mention of voters drawing up their tickets in various "shops" and "houses" on the day of the vote, see a letter of Richard Hockley to Thomas Penn, Nov. 1, 1742, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter *PMH&B*) 28(1) 1904, p. 41. (Source cited in Nash, "Transformation of urban politics," p. 623.) For patterns of vote totals in the city of Philadelphia see, Robert Dinkin, *Voting in provincial America: a study of elections in the thirteen colonies, 1689-1776* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), Table 10, p. 160, and also p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Letter of Edward Shippen to father, Sept. 14, 1756. *Shippen-Balch Papers*, vol. 1, p. 48, HSP, p. 48; letter of Samuel Purviance to James Burd, Sept. 20, 1765, *Shippen Papers*, vol. 6, HSP, p. 107. Both cited in Leonard, "Elections in colonial PA," pp. 388, 389.

<sup>27</sup> Isaac Norris to James Logan, Oct. 13, 1711. *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan, 1700-1750*, vol. II, p. 458. Norris argues the slate would have been more successful had more effort been put forth, and admits that he himself was tired "and therefore could not be more industrious."

<sup>28</sup> A BROTHER CHIP. *PA Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1770, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> PHILADELPHIUS. *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, Sept. 19-Sept. 26, 1772.



- <sup>30</sup> Isaac Norris to James Logan, June 29, 1710. *Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan*, vol. II, p. 427. Source cited in Nash, "Transformation of urban politics," p. 614.
- <sup>31</sup> A general description of the election grounds and of the area around the old city courthouse in colonial Philadelphia is found in two nineteenth century histories of the city: John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time*, vol. 1, (Leary Stuart and Co., Philadelphia: 1898), pp. 350, 351, (source cited in Leonard, "Colonial Elections in PA," p. 394), and Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: a history of the city and its people, a record of 225 year*, volume I (S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, Philadelphia: 1912) p. 148.
- <sup>32</sup> See the comments of William Allen on his actions at the start of Election Day, 1742. "Remonstrance to House of Clement Plumstead, late Mayor of Philadelphia, William Allen, Recorder, and Joseph Turner, Alderman." *PA Votes*, vol. 4. p. 2846. Allen claimed that the crowd surrounding him in the house was so large that he did not see the initial riot, suggesting that a good deal of drinking, and perhaps treating, was taking place.
- <sup>33</sup> For a mention of the Election Day ringing of the bells, see Henry Muhlenberg, *The Journals if Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, p. 273. Edward Warner and Isaac Pemberton describe the opening of the 1742 Election Day and the use of the trumpet in their evidence in *PA Votes*, vol. 4, pp. 3001, 3007.
- <sup>34</sup> The *PA Gazette*, Sept. 26-Oct. 5, 1732, p. 3, for example mentions the following speech from the sheriff: "Gentlemen, I take this publick Opportunity to thank the good People of the County and City for the Honours they have done me; I earnestly recommend Peace and Good nature to the Competitors in this Election, and with the County a good Choice in my successor."
- <sup>35</sup> Sect. One: "Supplemental Act," 1727, vol. 4, *PA Statutes*, p. 77.
- <sup>36</sup> *To the Free-Holders of the Province of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, 1742, (Evans 5075) p. 2; See also the preamble to "An Act directing choice of Inspectors," 1766, vol. 6, *PA Statutes*, vol. p. 32: noting that "great mischiefs" have arisen and "many frauds" have been committed during the course of the Inspector vote.
- <sup>37</sup> Sect. One "Supplemental Act," 1727, vol. 4, *PA Statutes*, p. 77; Sect II. "An Act Amending the Several Acts," 1745-46, vol. 5, *PA Statutes*, p. 18; Sections Five and Six: "An Act directing choice of Inspectors," 1766, vol. 6, *PA Statutes*, pp. 35, 36.
- <sup>38</sup> See the preambles to "An Act Amending the Several Acts," 1745-46, vol. 5, *PA Statutes*, p. 16; and, "An Act directing choice of Inspectors," 1766, vol. 6, *PA Statutes*, p. 32.
- <sup>39</sup> Depositions of Edward Warner and Israel Pemberton, Assemblymen. *PA Votes*, vol. 4. pp. 3002, 3007.
- <sup>40</sup> See the complaints raised against the inspectors in a "Letter from E.N." *The American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 15-Sept. 22, 1737. p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution* (Dana and Co.: New York, 1856) p. 218. Cited in Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the people: the rise of popular sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 182.
- <sup>42</sup> In his evidence about the 1742 riots, Joseph Lownes, mentions women watching from a balcony: *PA Votes*, vol. 4, p. 2971.
- <sup>43</sup> A visual description of the scene can be found in two colonial-era partisan broadsheets: *The Election, a Medly*, Philadelphia, 1765. (Evans No. 9650); and David Dove. *The COUNTER-MEDLY, being a proper ANSWER to the all the DUNCES of the MEDLY and their ABETTORS*, Philadelphia, 1765. (Evans 9943).
- <sup>44</sup> Letter from Pettit to Reed, Nov. 3, 1764, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, p. 36.
- <sup>45</sup> *Dialogue Shewing what's therein to be found*, op cit.
- <sup>46</sup> Depositions of John Hyatt, sheriff, Joseph Lownes, and Thomas Lynch. *PA Votes*, vol. 4, pp. 2962, 2972. 2999.; letter of Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, Nov. 17, 1742, p. 135. The practice of battling for the stairs is mentioned in both Ellis P. Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia; a history of the city and its people, a record of 225 years*, vol. 1 (Chicago: J.S. Clarke, 1912) pp. 148-49; Joseph Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the olden time*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: E.F. Stuart, 1888) p. 35, and Leonard, "Elections in colonial PA," p. 394.
- <sup>47</sup> Deposition of Hugh Roberts, shopkeeper, *PA Votes*, vol. 4, p. 2957.

- <sup>48</sup> The quote is from Thomas Bond and comes from the deposition of Samuel Burge, sadler. *PA Votes*, vol. 4. (p. 2996-97).
- <sup>49</sup> Letter of Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, Nov. 17, 1742, pp. 133, 137.
- <sup>50</sup> Sect. 13: "An Act directing choice of Inspectors," 1766, vol. 6, *PA Statutes*, p. 39. The act also separated the city from the county elections, presumably to lessen the crowding at the polls.
- <sup>51</sup> See Penn's 1700 "Charter of Privileges," and 4 *Anne*, chapter 129, in *A collection of all the laws of the province of Pennsylvania: now in force* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1742), pp. 49, 67. The criteria were more liberal for elections of sheriffs, coroners, and other local offices. Section One: "An act for the better regulating of Elections," 1717, *PA Votes*, vol. p. 139.
- <sup>52</sup> Chilton Williamson, *American suffrage: from property to democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) p. 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Williamson, *ibid.*, p. 11; also Michael Schudson, *The good citizen: a history of American civic life* (New York, Free Press, 1998) p. 28; J.R. Pole, *Political representation*, p. 31.
- <sup>54</sup> Gary Nash. *The urban crucible*, p. 26. The term deference is defined by Richard Beeman, "Deference, republicanism, and popular politics," as a society "consensual in its social and political relations but hierarchical in its distribution of power and authority," p. 403. Beeman credits J.R. Pole for explicitly creating the idea of deference (see Pole's *Political representation*), but argues that earlier writers, including Bagehot and Charles Sydnor, worked with something like the same concept. Beeman, *ibid.*, pp. 403, 404.
- <sup>55</sup> Gary Nash, "The Framing of Government in Pennsylvania; Ideas in Contact with Reality," in *Race, class, and politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986) p. 71
- <sup>56</sup> Nash, *The urban crucible*, pp. 33, 36. See also Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 19-24.
- <sup>57</sup> Nash, *The urban crucible*, p. 79. Other criticisms of the Frame, many also made by friends and acquaintances, can be found in *ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>58</sup> William Penn to "My Friends in Pennsylvania," July 18, 1687, *The Register of Pennsylvania*, ed. Samuel Hazard, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1830) p. 105. Cited in Nash, "The framing of government in Pennsylvania," pp. 77, 78.
- <sup>59</sup> "A Brother to the Brethren of the Chip." *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* Sept. 24-Oct. 1, 1770., p. 145. For the expression of similar sentiments see, Isaac Norris, Sr., to Jonathan Scarth, Oct. 21, 1726, *Norris Letter Book, 1716-1730*. Norris Papers Collection, HSP p. 475. Cited in Nash, "The transformation of urban politics," p. 606.
- <sup>60</sup> Robert Dinkin, *Voting in provincial America*, pp. 54-57. Of the 36 members of the Assembly in 1755, all but five were re-elected in October. One of those had died in the summer. *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 6, p. 210, note 7.
- <sup>61</sup> "In none of the 14 elections you mention did I ever appear as a candidate. I never did, directly or indirectly, solicit any Man's Vote. For six of the Years in which I was annually chosen, I was absent, residing in England." Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks on a late protest," *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 11, p. 433. See also the letter from Franklin to William Stahan, Dec. 2, 1762, *ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 161.
- <sup>62</sup> For a discussion of one such meeting, see Peters-Penn letter, Nov. 17, 1742. *op cit.*. Isaac Norris to Joseph Pike, Aug. 28, 1728, *Norris Letter Book, 1716-1730*, HSP, p. 516, argues that the clubs created by Sir William Keith served a similar purpose. Source cited in Nash, "Transformation of urban politics," p. 614.
- <sup>63</sup> That is the argument made in Norman Coen, "The Philadelphia Election Riot of 1742," *PMH&B*, 92(3) 1968, pp. 306, 207; and Olton, *Artisans for Independence*, p. 52. The generally low levels of estimated turnout can be found in Dinkin, *Voting in provincial America*, Table 9, pp. 158-59.
- <sup>64</sup> Beeman, "Deference, republicanism," pp. 423-427.
- <sup>65</sup> William Penn, "England's present Interest considered," *The Selected Works of William Penn*, vol. 2 (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971 [1825]) pp. 285, 286. Cited in Beeman, "Deference, republicanism, and popular politics," p. 423.
- <sup>66</sup> Tully, *Forming American politics*, pp. 75, 76.

- <sup>67</sup> William Keith, *The Observer's Trip to America*, Philadelphia, 1726 (Evans 2794), p. 17. Source cited in Nash, *Urban crucible*, p. 243.
- <sup>68</sup> *The Triumvirate of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, [1725?] (Evans No. 2712) p. 4. Source cited in Wendel, "The Keith-Lloyd Alliance," p. 300.
- <sup>69</sup> See Alan W. Tully, "Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in Early America," *PMH&B*, 107(4) 1983, pp. 498, 510, on the antipathy of the Scots-Irish to the English; Ronald Schulz, *The republic of labor: Philadelphia artisans and the politics of class, 1720-1830* (New York: Oxford, 1993) pp. 5-14, on the influence of radical political traditions among the city's working class, and J.R. Pole, *op cit*, for the influence of Whig theory on Penn.
- <sup>70</sup> Letter from James Logan to Henry Gouldney, Feb. 9, 1723, *PA Archives*, Second Series, vol. 7, pp. 70-71.
- <sup>71</sup> The BUSY-BODY, No. 32, *The American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 18-25, 1729, p. 2. Cited in Leonard, "Elections in colonial PA," p. 398.
- <sup>72</sup> Olton, *Artisans for Independence*, p. 51.
- <sup>73</sup> Tully, *Forming American politics*, p. 346; Leonard, "Elections in colonial Pennsylvania," pp. 387, 389, 390.
- <sup>74</sup> Norris-Pike letter, Aug. 28, 1728, p. 516.
- <sup>75</sup> Norris-Scarath letter, Oct. 21, 1726, pp. 474.
- <sup>76</sup> Patrick Gordon to John Penn, Oct. 17, 1726, *Penn Papers Official Correspondence*, vol. 1, HSP, p. 243.
- <sup>77</sup> Norris-Scarath letter, Oct. 21, 1726, p. 475.
- <sup>78</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, p. 345.
- <sup>79</sup> Gary Nash, "The transformation of urban politics; 1700-1765," *Journal of American History*, 60 (3) 1973 p. 631.
- <sup>80</sup> Charles S. Olton, *Artisans for Independence*, p. 55. See also the broadside, of engraver Robert Kennedy, *To the worthy TRADESMEN, ARTIFICERS, MECHANICS, &c*, Philadelphia, Oct. 1, 1770. (Evans 11696).
- <sup>81</sup> A BROTHER CHIP, *PA Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1770, p. 3.
- <sup>82</sup> *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* Sept 20-27, 1772, p. 143.
- <sup>83</sup> Letter of Edward Shippen to father, Sept. 14, 1756, p. 48. Cited in Leonard, "Elections in PA," p. 389.
- <sup>84</sup> Leonard, "Elections in colonial PA," p. 389.
- <sup>85</sup> An attack on Joseph Galloway in *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* Sept. 19-Sept. 26, 1772, p. 3, notes that the previous election Galloway had gone about handing advertisements for himself and "begging votes."
- <sup>86</sup> Norris-Charles letter, Oct. 11, 1740, p. 2; see also Norris-Scarath letter, *op cit*, on Keith's behavior; and Benjamin Franklin, "On the Conduct of Lord Hillsborough," p. 223.
- <sup>87</sup> Norris-Charles letter, Oct. 11, 1740, p. 3.
- <sup>88</sup> See the preamble and section one: "An Act for Preventing Bribery and Corruption," vol. 5, *PA Statutes*, p. 159.
- <sup>89</sup> BUSY-BODY, *The American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 18-25, 1729, p. 3. Source cited in Leonard, "Colonial Elections in PA," p. 385. It should be noted here, however, that the writer seems to have been opposed to Keith, and so may have been using the figure for polemics.
- <sup>90</sup> An example of such an ad is run by Isaac Norris, Jr., in the *PA Gazette*, Sept. 26, 1759, p. 1.
- <sup>91</sup> *To the Freeholders and other Electors, of ASSEMBLY-MEN for PENNSYLVANIA*, Philadelphia, 1765. (Evans 10184) p. 1.
- <sup>92</sup> A broadside by John Dickinson, *Fellow Citizens and countrymen*, Oct. 1, 1772: Philadelphia (Evans 42363), begins by decrying faction and party but ends by recommending a slate of honest patriots to the reader.
- <sup>93</sup> Pettit-Reed letter, Nov. 3, 1764, p. 36.
- <sup>94</sup> Peters-Penn letter, Nov. 17, 1742, p. 136. Quoted in Thompson, *Rum punch and revolution*, p. 132.

- <sup>95</sup> Several witnesses to the riots quoted complaints by William Allen and Mayor Clement Plumstead about the un-naturalized “Dutch” that the opposition had brought to the city. John Dillwyn, deposition. *PA Votes*, vol. 4, p. 2958; Thomas Lloyd, *ibid.*, p. 2958; for the defense of Allen, Plumstead and others, see “Remonstrance to House of Clement Plumstead, late Mayor of Philadelphia, William Allen, Recorder, and Joseph Turner, Alderman,” *ibid.*, pp. 2844-46.
- <sup>96</sup> Hockley-Penn letter, Nov. 1, 1742, p. 41; Peters-Penn letter, Nov. 17, 1742, p. 137.
- <sup>97</sup> Hockley-Penn, Nov. 1, 1742, p. 41.
- <sup>98</sup> William Parsons, “The Bloody Election of 1742,” *Pennsylvania History*, 36: 1969, pp. 304-306; Hermann Welleneuther, “The Quest for Harmony in a Turbulent World: The Principle of ‘Love and Unity’ in Colonial Pennsylvania Politics,” *PMH&B*, 107(4) 1983, p. 552, both note the negative effect the riots had on the Proprietary cause and Allen especially; for the use of the riots as propaganda, see “To the FREEHOLDERS and other ELECTORS for the City and County of Philadelphia...” *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 11, p. 377.
- <sup>99</sup> Welleneuther, “The Quest for Harmony in a Turbulent World,” pp. 539-543.
- <sup>100</sup> PHILANDER, *PA Gazette*, May 12, 1768, p.1; *To the Free-Holders of the Province of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, 1742 (Evans 5075) p. 4
- <sup>101</sup> *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* Sept. 19-Sept. 26, 1772, p. 3
- <sup>102</sup> *A Letter from a Gentleman in Philadelphia to his Friend in the County*, Sept. 8, 1742. Philadelphia (Evans Number 4987.) p.2 Cited in Parsons, “The Bloody Election of 1742,” p. 295.
- <sup>103</sup> Gary Nash, “The transformation of urban politics; 1700-1765,” p. 617, note 43.
- <sup>104</sup> Compare the *PA Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1744, p. 4, with the same journal on Sept. 28, 1754, p. 3 (5 ads), and the issue for Sept. 27, 1764, pp. 4 (14 ads).
- <sup>105</sup> James Logan to William Penn, Oct. 20, 1706, and Logan to Penn, Jan 6, 1708-09, *Penn-Logan Correspondence*, pp. 188, 336. Both sources from Nash, *Urban crucible*, pp. 442, 443.
- <sup>106</sup> Evidence of Thomas Lloyd. *PA Votes*, vol. 4, p. 2958.
- <sup>107</sup> *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, p. 618. See also Muhlenberg’s comments on the “crowded and noisy” state of the town for an earlier Election Day, *ibid.*, p. 517.
- <sup>108</sup> Two examples of Election Day broadsides are Dickinson, *op cit.*, and Robert Kennedy, *To the worthy TRADESMEN, ARTIFICERS, MECHANICS, &c*, Oct. 1, 1770. Phila. (Evans 9772); Charles Pettit’s letter to Joseph Reed, Nov. 3, 1764, p. 37, notes that on the day of the 1764 election there were “A number of squibs, quarters, and half sheets, were thrown among the populace on the day of the election, some so copious as to aim at the general dispute, and others, more confined, to Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Galloway, with now and then a skit at the Doctor, but these had little or no effect.” See also Nash, “Transformation of Urban politics,” p. 617, note 43.
- <sup>109</sup> Pettit-Reed letter, Nov. 3, 1764, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, p. 36.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>111</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, pp. 11-27
- <sup>112</sup> Isaac Hunt, *A Continuation of the Exercise, had this Morning in Scurrility Hall, 1765*. No. 5, Philadelphia, 1765 (Evans 10019) p. 5. Source cited in Gleason, “A scurrilous election,” p. 82.
- <sup>113</sup> Norris-Pike letter, Aug. 28, 1728, p. 516.
- <sup>114</sup> Pole, *Political representation*, p. 89.
- <sup>115</sup> “Minutes of the Provincial Council,” Lt. Gov. Patrick Gordon to the council, Dec. 17, 1728. *Colonial Records of PA*, vol. 3, Third Series, p. 342.
- <sup>116</sup> Pole, *Political representation*, pp. 111, 112.
- <sup>117</sup> Tully, “Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in Early America,” p. 497.
- <sup>118</sup> Attacks on Presbyterians are in Thomas Wharton to Benjamin Franklin, Nov. 7, 1765, *Franklin Papers*, vol. 12, p. 357; *The Election, a Medly*, Philadelphia, 1765, (Broadside, Evans No. 9650); and *To the Freeholders and other Electors, of ASSEMBLY-MEN for PENNSYLVANIA*, Philadelphia, 1765 (Evans 10184) p. 1.
- <sup>119</sup> William Smith, *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania* (New York: Joseph Sabin, 1865 [1755]) p. 19; Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, Aug. 25, 1742, *Peters Letter Book*, Richard Peter’s

- Papers, 1739-1743, HSP, p. 128. Source cited in Nash, "Transformation of urban politics," p. 608. The practice is also noted in Pole, *Political representation*, p. 102, and Thayer, *Pennsylvania politics*, p. 16.
- <sup>120</sup> Letter from Hugh Neill to the Secretary of the Venerable Society, Oct. 18, 1764. *Historical Collections of the American colonial church*, ed. William Stevens Perry, vol. 2 (Hartford, CT: The Church Press, 1870) p. 365.
- <sup>121</sup> *The Pennsylvania Chronicle*, Sept. 19 to 26, 1768. p. 282.
- <sup>122</sup> *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, vol. II, p. 272.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123, 273.
- <sup>124</sup> Purviance-Burd letter, Sept. 20, 1765, p. 107.
- <sup>125</sup> William Smith, *A Brief State*, pp. 19, 40-42.
- <sup>126</sup> "Letter from E.N." *The American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 15-Sept. 22, 1737. p. 2.
- <sup>127</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks on a late Protest," *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. Vol. 11. p. 434.
- <sup>128</sup> Letter from Thomas Wharton to Benjamin Franklin, Nov. 7, 1765, *Franklin Papers*, vol. 12, p. 357.
- <sup>129</sup> Evidence of Israel Pemberton, Jr., *PA Votes*, vol. 4, 2969.
- <sup>130</sup> *The Scribbler: Observations on a late Epitaph*, Philadelphia, 1764 (Evans No. 9772) p. 4.
- <sup>131</sup> The BUSY-BODY, *The American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 18-Sept. 25, No. 32, p. 2.
- <sup>132</sup> For relationship between the press and the early postal service see Richard B. Kielbowicz, *News in the mail: the press, post office and public information, 1700-1860s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) pp. 13-19.
- <sup>133</sup> Purviance-Burd letter, Sept. 20, 1765, p. 107; Burd-Purviance, Sept. 17, 1764, p. 109. Edward Shippen letter to his father, Sept. 14, 1756, p. 48.
- <sup>134</sup> See Norris-Scarath letter, *op cit*, and Edward Shippen to father, *op cit*.
- <sup>135</sup> Examples of pamphlets from the 1720s include: *A Modest Apology for the Eight Members*, Philadelphia, 1728, (Evans 3065); *Dialogue Shewing, what's therein to be found; The Triumvirate of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, [1725?] (Evans No. 2712); and William Keith, *A modest reply to the Speech of Isaac Norris, Esq.* Philadelphia, 1727 (Evans 2890).
- <sup>136</sup> Joseph Jackson, "A Philadelphia Schoolmaster of the Eighteenth Century," *PMH&B*, 35(3) 1911, pp. 315-332.
- <sup>137</sup> Compare a pamphlet of Isaac Hunt, *A Continuation of the Exercise, had this Morning in Scurrility Hall, 1765. No. 3*. Philadelphia, 1765 (Evans 10017), with the coverage in *PA Gazette*, Sept. 20, 1764.
- <sup>138</sup> J. Philip Gleason, "A scurrilous Colonial Election and Franklin's Reputation" *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 18(1) 1961, pp. 68-84. Another example is *What is sauce for a goose is also sauce for a gander*, Philadelphia, 1764 (Evans 9879). Source cited in Gleason, "A scurrilous election," p. 76.
- <sup>139</sup> Nash, "The transformation of Urban Politics," note 43, p. 617.
- <sup>140</sup> *To the worthy TRADESMEN, ARTIFICERS, MECHANICS, &c*, Oct. 1, 1770. Phila. (Broadside, Evans 11696).
- <sup>141</sup> See, for example, *Observations on a late Epitaph*, Philadelphia, 1764 (Evans 9772), p. 4.
- <sup>142</sup> Examples: *PA Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1755, p. 2, 3; *The American Weekly Mercury*, Oct. 8, 1728, p. 3.
- <sup>143</sup> As an example see PENNSYLVANUS. "Against Party Malice and Levity." *PA Gazette*, Sept. 21-Sept. 28, 1733, pp. 2,3.
- <sup>144</sup> The quote is from *The Pennsylvania Chronicle*, Sept. 28-Oct. 5, 1767, p. 146.
- <sup>145</sup> *The American Weekly Mercury*, Oct. 8, 1728. "[T]here appeared to be the greatest industry on all sides for gaining of Representatives for the County of Philadelphia, that was ever have before on such occasion." p. 2; *The PA Gazette*, Oct. 7, 1756., p. 3.
- <sup>146</sup> *PA Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1742, p. 3
- <sup>147</sup> Thomas Leonard, *Power of the Press: the birth of American political reporting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) pp. 13-22.
- <sup>148</sup> Leonard notes that Benjamin Franklin, publisher of one of the main newspapers in the city, tended to be a rather cautious editor for most of his career. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- <sup>150</sup> CATO, "To the Freemen, etc." *American Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 20-Sept. 27. 1729, p. 1.

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- <sup>151</sup> J.A., "Letter," *American Weekly Mercury*, Sept 18-Sept. 25, 1735, p. 1.
- <sup>152</sup> Barnhurst and Nerone, *The form of news*, pp. 32-34.
- <sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>154</sup> Peters-Penn letter, Nov. 17, 1742, p. 138.
- <sup>155</sup> PENNSYLVANUS. "Against Party Malice and Levity." *PA Gazette*, Sept. 21-Sept. 28, 1733, p. 3
- <sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>157</sup> Pennsylvania Assembly, "Reply to the Governor," Aug. 19, 1755. *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 6. p. 156. See also Benjamin Franklin, "On the Conduct of Lord Hillsborough," [August?, 1772] *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 17. ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959) pp. 222, 223. "But in most of the Colonies there is no such Thing as standing Candidate for Election. There is neither Treating nor Bribing. No Man even expresses the least inclination to be chosen. Instead of humble Advertisements intreating Votes and Interest, you see before every new Election, Requests of former Members, acknowledging the Honour done them by preceeding Elections, but setting forth their long Service and Attendance on the Public Business in that Station, and praying that in Consideration thereof some other Person may now be chosen in their Room."
- <sup>158</sup> Compare turnouts for Philadelphia County in the relatively peaceful 1730s, with those in more turbulent 1760s, for example. Dinkin, *Voting in provincial America*, Table 9, pp. 158-59.
- <sup>159</sup> *A dialogue shewing*, p. 30.
- <sup>160</sup> PENNSYLVANUS, "Against Party malice," *PA Gazette*, Sept. 21-28, p. 2. A BROTHER CHIP, *PA Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1770. p. 3.

## **Chapter Four: The Election Day in the early republic**

This account of Election Day in post-revolutionary and federalist Philadelphia will proceed from two general claims about the city's public life. The first, evident in traditional political histories, is that the electoral culture of the city and the state of Pennsylvania was, for much of the period in question, a strongly partisan one.<sup>1</sup> This should not be surprising. Given their experience of electioneering in colonial politics, Pennsylvanians had a ready-made set of cultural forms with which to understand democratic politics, and were thus probably much more comfortable with the emergence of party institutions than many other Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The second claim, which arises from recent work on the popular street culture of this period, is that the city's public life was a highly theatrical and festive one. America during the 1790s contained many popular public performances, such as parades and celebrations, that aimed at the construction and elaboration of a newly emerging American identity, a distinct national community that had arisen out of the rebellion against British rule.<sup>3</sup> As one of the first cities to commemorate both the Fourth of July and Washington's birthday, and as the largest city in America at the time and its national capital throughout the 1790s, Philadelphia is an especially appropriate site to study public celebration during this period.<sup>4</sup>

These two elements—partisanship and street theatre—often met in the performance of a public occasion like the Fourth of July. Federalists and Republicans both used these events to publicly distinguish themselves from one another and—through marches and public toasts—to perform and personally embody an image of

the new world they wished to create.<sup>5</sup> As both Albrecht Koschnik and David Waldstreicher have noted, these early Federalist public performances thus had something of a paradoxical character. Partisans declared their loyalty to a unified national culture, but at the same time vigorously contested their opponent's moral claims, by marking commemorations, and reporting on them, in a decidedly partisan fashion.<sup>6</sup>

Partisanship and theater also met on November 5, 1796, which was the day that Philadelphians chose their electors for President, following a keen campaign between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. This chapter will end with a description of that campaign and that Election Day. Before doing so, however, and in order to place that event in some context, I will review both the evolution of Pennsylvania's political divisions and the arguments about Federalist imagery and celebrations that I have just sketched. Following that, I will look at how the vote and the electorate were constructed in the popular discourse, and then address the changing role of the press in presenting and interpreting the Election Day performance. Having gone over these elements, we can better understand what Philadelphians were doing on Election Day in 1796. We will also better understand the role that the Election Day ritual, both the performance of it on the Election grounds and the representation of it in the press, played in the political culture of the age.

The problematic existence of partisan political culture:



The historian Jackson Main has made a distinction among early American legislators between the *localist* and the *cosmopolitan*, a distinction that helps us capture the social and ideological divisions in American politics throughout this period. Although there was not, at least prior to the 1790s, anything like a national network linking politicians and voters, Main argues that competing groups in the various states nonetheless had certain traits in common. The ranks of the localists were made up mainly of small farmers, the urban working and lower middle classes, and some of the larger plantation-owning gentry in the south. Localists were suspicious of government power and opposed taxes and the increase or further development of state institutions. In their rhetoric, they tended to celebrate the common man, and emphasized the principles of egalitarianism and freedom. Cosmopolitans came from the urban merchant, trading, and banking classes, and the wealthier classes generally. They were more conservative in their social opinions than the localists, with a more pessimistic view of human nature, hence a more positive opinion of hierarchy and tradition, and the social restraints they produced. They were suspicious of unrestricted liberty, associating it with license and anarchy, were more likely to be well read, and favored the extension of state power and the development of economic and communication infrastructures.<sup>7</sup>

The localist-cosmopolitan distinction helps orient us within Pennsylvania's political culture of the late 1770s and 1780s. Main's localists are similar, both ideologically and in terms of their social bases of support, with what were known as constitutionalists at the time; the politics of the constitutionalists' opposition, who

were generally called the republicans, fit with his description of the cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>8</sup> The creation of these two factions came out of debates over the state's 1776 constitution. That document was one of the most radical and egalitarian of the constitutions produced in the revolutionary era, and served as a model for several other states.<sup>9</sup> It was too radical, in fact, for many Pennsylvanians, and much of the state's political battles until the late 1780s were conducted through the prism of debates over the constitution. Republicans distrusted the unicameral structure of the legislature, and they drew on widespread discontent with such measures as the Test Laws—requirements that citizens publicly declare loyalty to the new republic before being allowed to vote, sit on juries, or serve in public office—to bolster their argument and their support at the polls.<sup>10</sup> Constitutionalist defended the original 1776 provisions and many later measures passed during the height of the war, when their strength in the legislature was greatest.<sup>11</sup>

The first step in the evolution of these groups came in the summer and fall of 1787, during the debate over whether or not Pennsylvania should adopt the federal constitution. The ideological sympathies of the state's constitutionalists meant that many of them, and certainly the most prominent, tended to side with the anti-federalists. Republicans and their sympathizers, more likely to support federalism, won that battle, and in 1790 won another important political fight when they were able to overturn the 1776 constitution with a more conservative document.<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1790s, the factions began to morph again, and began to mold themselves into a culture that was more consciously a national one. At the national

level Republicans—almost the direct opposites of Pennsylvania’s republican faction of the decade before—had ideological affinities with the constitutionalists of the earlier period, although historians differ over the extent of institutional and personal continuity.<sup>13</sup> They were sympathetic to the ideals of the French revolution, and tended to emphasize equality and liberty in their popular appeals. In the polemics of the day they would often attack their opponents, the Federalists, as Aristocrats and British sympathizers.<sup>14</sup> Like Main’s localists, Republicans tended to be suspicious of federal power, seeing in it the possibility of government tyranny.<sup>15</sup>

The other main party, the Federalists, was generally sympathetic to the expansion of government’s role in society. More conservative politically and socially than the Republicans, Federalists had tended to dominate the policies and the membership of the second Washington administration.<sup>16</sup> This had led to a growing distrust of the President among Republicans, especially following the publication of the Jay Treaty, which was seen by Republicans and other radicals as being far too sympathetic to the British, who were at the time at war with France, the Republicans’ ally.<sup>17</sup> Since Republicans looked upon France as the natural ally of the United States, given both its history of aid during the American Revolution and its own revolutionary tradition, the treaty was taken to be a betrayal of fundamental principles and alliances, and led to demonstrations in Philadelphia and other cities, in which John Jay was burned in effigy.<sup>18</sup>

Other events helped further divide the two sides. A tax on whisky led to a revolt in Western Pennsylvania, during which Washington was forced to send out

militia troops to arrest and subdue the citizenry.<sup>19</sup> A debate over the treatment of the French envoy to America, Edmond Genet, led to more demonstrations among radicals, both in Philadelphia and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Washington and other more conservative-minded politicians became alarmed at the growth of what were known as Democratic-Republican societies, groups of ordinary citizens who met to discuss and debate politics. The thought among many in the Washington administration was that these societies were presumptuous and dangerous.<sup>21</sup> In Philadelphia, the leadership of the Democratic-Republican Societies tended to be men of a more radical and thus Republican stripe: Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of one of the most famous of Philadelphia's Republican newspapers, *The Aurora*, and Dr. Michael Leib, a Republican politician and a leader of the city's German community.<sup>22</sup>

The direct involvement of a newspaperman like Bache in political affairs was not unusual in Philadelphia of the Federalist age. Federalist-Republican divisions touched upon most features of public life at that time, which led almost inevitably to a polarization in the press. Philadelphia, as head of the government, was home to a number of notable partisan polemicists: men like Bache, John Fenno, editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, Philip Freneau, William Cobbett, and Thomas Callender.<sup>23</sup> The partisan character of the Federalist press is so impressive, in fact, that most histories of both the press and of politics during this period tend to see the press almost exclusively through a partisan lens.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of this journalistic culture was often at its fiercest in the weeks of campaigning preceding Election Day.

### The public performance of American nationhood:

Partisanship in the Federalist era meant something more than opinions on administration policy. As Gordon Wood and Joyce Appleby, among others, have argued, the American Revolution's radical nature came about through its effect on the society as a whole, not simply its rearrangement of political authority.<sup>25</sup> The ideals of social equality and personal freedom, made explicit in the revolution, ended up infecting all elements of social life in the new country. "[M]ost people of that very different world could not as yet conceive of society apart from government;" hence they saw their political revolution also as a social revolution.<sup>26</sup> And indeed, Wood argues, they were right about that: twenty years after the revolution had ended, Americans were simply a different people than they had been before: less deferent in their interpersonal relations, more willing to accept the notion that different groups in society had different interests, more aggressive in their claims toward traditional authority.<sup>27</sup>

The contemporary belief that the revolution had created a whole new world, that it would affect every element of human existence, was evident in the public celebrations and the public rhetoric that the Philadelphia's residents undertook during this period, which were self-consciously linked to the political and social experiment of American democracy. The character of celebrations served to mark out the character of the nation itself. For the celebrations of 1788, and in honor of the state's ratification of the federal constitution the year before, the city held an elaborate

parade. All sectors of society—from the social elite to various artisan groups and mechanics—were represented in the march. A float with the name “Constitution” bore the state’s Chief Justice, Thomas McKean, through the streets. McKean held in his hand a banner with the words “The People.” At the head of the ten major city streets coming off the Delaware River, a soldier stood with the flag of every state that had ratified the Constitution.<sup>28</sup>

The history of the Federalist celebrations is reminiscent of Richard Sennett’s earlier argument concerning life in the eighteenth century European city, and the self-conscious manner in which residents linked their public lives to a dramatic performance in the *theatrum mundi*.<sup>29</sup> Sennett’s argument extends beyond the public celebration, however, to the everyday interaction of strangers that took place on the streets of London and Paris. Something like the same kind of attitude may have been operating in the streets of Philadelphia. The idea of the self-conscious presentation of a public role might explain, for example, the dramatic insults and overwrought expostulations traded between men like Cobbett, Callender, Fenno and Bache, in the pages of the city’s newspapers.

Sennett’s argument extends to fashion as well. Citizens chose their style of dress, he argues, in the manner of a costume: the forms of fashion helped residents understand the role that the wearer was attempting to put forth.<sup>30</sup> Given this understanding of public life, it is perhaps no surprise that Philadelphians believed their revolution ought to affect even their fashion sense, as in a 1788 letter to the *Independent Gazetteer*, wherein a writer argued that the new world which would come

about would require a new form of dress, one emphasizing the simplicity and equality of the American nation.<sup>31</sup>

It is not clear that anyone took the writer's proposals to heart, but one interesting change in fashion that did take place during the decade of the 1790s was the wearing of a feathered cockade. Republicans began the practice, putting red, white, and blue cockades in their caps as a show of moral solidarity with the French revolution.<sup>32</sup> On the day after the 1796 election, the French Minister to the United State, Pierre Adet, argued that the public display of the cockade was an obligation for all French men living in the United States, and for all supporters of the revolution and its ideals more generally: "Citizens, I am persuaded that at the call of the Minister of the French Republic, you will hasten to put on a symbol of liberty, which is the fruit of eight years' toils and privations, and of five years' victories." By so doing, Adet argued, wearers of the cockade would draw a public distinction between their own loyalty and the lukewarm patriot.<sup>33</sup>

Several years later, Federalist sympathizers began a similar practice, only using the black cockade. Although soldiers of the Continental Army had sometimes put black feathers in their caps, the symbol gained a partisan meaning when young Federalists began wearing it during a national "Day of Fasting" proposed by President Adams on May 9, 1798. Cobbett called it the Federalist cockade the "American Cockade."<sup>34</sup> As with the Republican practice, the wearing of the black cockade served to link the partisan to the larger ideological understanding embodied by his party, and by declaring his allegiance publicly served to distinguish him from his opponents in

the street. “The handwriting at the bottom of an address is seen by but few persons,” wrote Peter Porcupine, “whereas a cockade will be seen by the whole city, by the friends and the foes of the wearer; it will be the visible sign of the sentiments of his hearts, and which prove, that he is not ashamed to show those sentiments.”<sup>35</sup> The role that a cockade could play as a public marker of allegiance would be significant for Election Day, 1796, since it allowed voters to declare their political sympathies and their choice for President despite the secrecy of the ballot.

It was not long before events like the Fourth of July celebrations became segregated, partisan moments. Each side strove to present its own vision of what American society should be, using a different tone and emphasis. Republicans, Koschnik has argued, used the occasion to illustrate and celebrate the revolution as an ongoing and necessarily unfinished process. Federalists, on the other hand, stressed the idea of the Fourth as a commemoration of the foundation of the country, a completed event that had resulted in the creation of the American nation.<sup>36</sup> On certain occasions, the day’s events acted, in effect, as the start for the year’s election season. Republican supporters would march on the celebration grounds, and prominent leaders of the party would speak to the crowd, providing a distinctly Republican interpretation of the day’s political significance.<sup>37</sup>

As with partisan politicking and electioneering, the press played an important role in the transmission of these Federalist celebrations and in the interpretation of them. Waldstreicher has argued that the two forms of communication—the celebration and the press—worked together to form an image of the new nation: “Celebrations and



printed accounts of them embodied and mobilized a nationalist ideology, an ideology that made consensus the basis of patriotism.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite their clear recognition both of the importance of the public celebration in Federalist politics and its ability to make manifest the divisions between the two major factions, historians of these festivals and celebrations tend to ignore or pass over the ritual of Election Day in their discussions. This is somewhat surprising, given the evident importance that the act of voting played for Pennsylvanians themselves during this period, as a public symbol. An oration following the 1788 Fourth of July celebration, for example, contained this paean to the vote:

if the people, at their elections, take care to choose none but representatives that are wise and good; their representatives will take care, in their turn, to choose or appoint none but such as are wise and good also...of what immense consequence is it, then, that this primary duty should be faithfully and skillfully discharged? On it the public happiness or infelicity, under this and every other constitution, must, in a very great measure, depend...Let no one say that he is but a single citizen; and that his ticket will be but one in the box. That one ticket may turn the election. In battle, every soldier should consider the public safety as depending on his single arm. At an election, every citizen should consider the public happiness as depending on his single vote.<sup>39</sup>

The use of such language suggests the extent to which some Philadelphians understood the vote as an essential act in defining this new world that was being created. “[E]very man who is guilty of neglect or omission of this essential duty,” wrote one writer, “is a traitor to his freedom and his county.”<sup>40</sup>

The performance of the vote served to link the people with the ideals that Americans first fully enunciated in the revolution. It served, as well, as a way for a new public to see itself taking shape on the Election Grounds. A journalist for the

*Pennsylvania Evening Herald* reported on one year's crowd on the election ground as being composed of a democratic, cosmopolitan "assemblage of various nations, ranks, degrees, ages, sizes and complexions," which had "proceeded to the state-house, to exercise their sacred right of investing with legislative and executive powers such of their fellow citizens as a majority of them might deem most worthy of the important trust: What a noble idea must we must have of that constitution," the writer added, "which annually strips the garments of office from servants; awakes them from the intoxicating delirium of power; and plunges them into the mass of the people! May PENNSYLVANIA never cease to prize this inestimable privilege proportionably to its value! May her sons, till time shall be no more, esteem life, when compared with it, as beneath the smallest regard!"<sup>41</sup>

The voting public:

The radical 1776 Constitution removed most of the economic barriers to voting that existed in the colonial era. Under the new conditions, a freeman was no longer defined through ownership either of land or of capital. All male taxpayers over the age of 21 were given the right to vote, provided that they had paid some tax to the state in the previous year, and had resided in Pennsylvania for a period of one year.<sup>42</sup> That status changed only slightly with the more conservative 1790 constitution, which kept the liberal economic criteria that were contained in the state's original constitution, but doubled the residency requirement, from one to two years.<sup>43</sup> These changes signaled an important evolution in the construction of the electorate, since the voter no longer

needed to prove his autonomy and sobriety through the ownership of property. Although Pennsylvanians at this point did not believe in universal suffrage or even white male suffrage, they had nonetheless taken an important first step toward the idea that democratic citizens had a natural right to vote, as both Chilton Williamson and Alexander Keyssar note.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these liberalizations, however, not all of the changes in Pennsylvania's franchise were in the direction of inclusion. Most notorious were series of measures passed by Pennsylvania's radical state legislature demanding a public acknowledgement of loyalty to the new regime before being granted the privileges of voting, sitting on a jury, or serving in a public office. The measures were known collectively as the test laws, or test oaths. An early version, passed in the fall of 1776, announced that:

Every Elector, before his vote is received, shall take the following Oath or Affirmation, instead of that heretofore required, viz—*I-----do swear, (or affirm) that I will be faithful and true to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and that I will not directly or indirectly, do any Act or Thing prejudicial or injurious to the Constitution or Government thereof, as established by the Convention.*<sup>45</sup>

These moves served to keep the vote out of the hands of many of the state's citizens.<sup>46</sup> Critics charged that the form of the oath served not simply to make the loyalties of citizens known, but effectively barred criticism of the government of *any* sort, and even historians generally sympathetic to the radical view tend to concede that this was in fact part of their goal.<sup>47</sup> Defenders of the test laws, however, argued in the press and elsewhere that they were necessary to defend the country from internal enemies at a time of great struggle. DEMOPHILUS wrote, for example that “the body

politic can be preserved from the effects of corruption no other way than the body natural, that is, by a total excision of the sphaceleted part.”<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the revolutionaries had some reason to be wary about what Tory sympathizers could do with Election Day, since in the early stages of the revolution, several communities near the city provided illustrations of how those opposed to the revolution could use the day of the vote to attack it symbolically. In 1776, Tory sympathizers in Nuetown, Bucks County, held a separate election for their own set of representatives, under the auspices of the King’s authority, on the traditional October General Election date. That same year, Loyalist citizens of Lewes, in southern New Jersey, used the occasion of Election Day to attack several well-known supporters of the revolution. After roughing up the revolutionists, the crowd cut down a “Liberty Tree” that had been planted in the center of the town, then paraded about shouting out huzzahs for King George and General Howe. A revolutionary partisan also charged the Loyalists with placing a guard at the polling station with a club, in order to prevent supporters of the rebellion from voting.<sup>49</sup>

However, the laws did not bar only Tories from the polls. Because of religious prohibitions, it was impossible for a great many Quakers and other dissenting sects in the province to both keep the tenets of their faith and declare the oaths. Contemporary estimates were that somewhere around 40 per cent of the otherwise eligible population of voters were disfranchised by the laws.<sup>50</sup> These estimates come from polemical works written against the laws, so there may be some exaggeration for effect. Robert Brunhouse has noted that the laws were often rather sporadically invoked,<sup>51</sup> and

several Philadelphia newspapers observed that they were not required in the city's 1776 General Election, as had been required by the Convention.<sup>52</sup> The principle of the test oaths nonetheless continued to irk a great many people, and they formed a major part of the republicans' attack on the 1776 constitution during the 1780s.<sup>53</sup> As the revolution began to wind down, cries against the test laws became louder in the popular press. In a series of articles HAMPDEN attacked the laws as unjust and oppressive.<sup>54</sup> Benjamin Rush called them "the invention of tyrants."<sup>55</sup> By the end of the 1780s, even the opponents of the conservative republican faction in the state assembly were writing their partisan appeals under the assumption that the laws had, at best, outlived their usefulness.<sup>56</sup>

These writers generally did not attack the laws on behalf of some Enlightenment belief in the universal rights of man. Theirs was a more conservative argument; they were defending the rights not of all those excluded from the vote, but only taxpayers, and their rhetoric relied on the traditional notion, generally accepted throughout the colonies and Britain long before the revolution, that those who contributed economically to the welfare of the state had a right to say something about how it operated.<sup>57</sup> The perceived injustice came from the fact that many of the wealthiest men in Pennsylvania, who had contributed financially to the revolution from the start, were to be denied their say in the way the government was run.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the argument over who ought to constitute the electorate in Pennsylvania mirrored the larger argument that was going on between the two sets of factions in the city and the state during this period. It was a battle between the more conservative

understanding of society of the republicans and Federalists, in which political reliability was linked to stability and a well-defined and understood place in the social hierarchy, and the more radical social beliefs of the Jeffersonians and Constitutionals, who saw the willingness to declare oneself publicly for the cause, or to prove one's loyalty on the battlefield, as the mark of the good citizen and trustworthy voter.<sup>59</sup>

Because the parties in early revolutionary Philadelphia were so closely identified in the public mind with class, these political debates piggybacked on economic divisions, which were in some cases also linked to religious divisions.<sup>60</sup> The writings of radical journalists in Philadelphia during the 1780s and 1790s sneered at the “gentlemen,” the “Aristocrats,” the “lovers of rank” who used bribery and tricks to steal the vote on Election Day.<sup>61</sup> For the Federalist or conservative writer, on the other hand, the glorification of radical democracy was nothing more than a step toward mob rule and anarchy. On Election Day, 1800, *The Philadelphia Gazette* warned “REAL AMERICAN REPUBLICANS” to beware “of the tricks of FOREIGN OUTCASTS,” who wished to “establish A DESPOTISM!” and counseled voters to watch for a “Jacobin” ticket nominated by “ANARCHISTS.”<sup>62</sup>

As a performance of economic class and political ideology, the Election Day ritual gave a distinctive set of contours to the public image of the electorate represented on that day, as in this report of the 1785 Election Day in the city.

“My dear fellow, here's the staunch supporters of the constitution—your approved friends—men who have taken care of the mechanic's interest—huzza!—they are for the paper money—Damn the bank—

down with the bank for ever!—We'll have no nabobs—no great men—no *aristocrats*—huzza boys!—Success to the constitution for ever!”—

“My dear friends!—Happy to see you!—How are you, Jack—How's all your family, Bill—What's the matter with you, Ned—How do, Harry?—Welcome to Philadelphia once more, Dick.—Are you going to vote?—Here's the ticket—friends of equal liberty—men who understand trade and commerce—not the damned *prospertan* (?) crew, who ride rough-shod over the people, like Oliver Cromwell—huzza!—Three cheers!—Commerce and equal liberty for ever! Come on my lads, come on!”<sup>63</sup>

Significantly, this manner of presenting the battle at the polls—as one between Republican and Federalist, Mechanic and banker, democrat and conservative—meant that other social divisions were almost entirely ignored in debates over membership in the voting public. While blacks were not formally excluded at this time, for example, there is no evidence that they ever voted in Federalist Philadelphia, despite the fact that they did vote in several other Northern cities, including New York.<sup>64</sup> This feature of Philadelphia's Election Day caused relatively little comment in the city's political debates over suffrage. Benjamin Rush, for example, while railing against the test oaths, justified the exclusion of blacks from the polls on the grounds that they did not pay taxes.<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, although women were allowed to vote across the river, in New Jersey, they were explicitly excluded from the polls in Pennsylvania, which specified only *freemen* could vote.<sup>66</sup> Because women voters tended to support the Federalist cause in New Jersey, Federalist journalists did make an occasional pitch for including them on Pennsylvania's Election Days. “Were the ladies permitted to vote generally in Pennsylvania, we should have on the federal side the suffrages of all the wives and

children of every drunken jacobin in the state—and were the ladies permitted to legislate, every beer house, every gin shop, would soon be deprived of its licence.— These hot-beds of Jacobinism once eradicated, an attachment to order and to our excellent government, would be the immediate consequence of returning sobriety.<sup>67</sup> This suggestion seems to be intended to serve more as a way to score rhetorical points than as a serious proposal, and there is no evidence that the idea of women voting in Pennsylvania at the time was ever considered seriously enough even to attack it. Philadelphia's Election Day, its electorate, and its public culture generally, was defined by the division between the radical many, and the conservative few, among adult white males living in the state. Such a division did not leave room for addressing the political grievances of those groups that found themselves in neither camp.

#### Election Day and the press:

In the work of Thomas Leonard, the revolution marks a significant change in the social role of the American journalist. Not only does the journalist take on a greater responsibility for interpreting public life for his readership, but the very style of that interpretation implies a different view of politics in the post-revolutionary age. That is to say, the art of the exposé in the popular press transformed social evil from a work of the devil to the work of political corruption. The journalist became a revealer of secrets.<sup>68</sup> In the context of Election Day, as we will see, this meant uncovering and detecting efforts at corrupting the ballot and the voting booth.



Barnhurst and Nerone have recently expanded upon this argument, suggesting that the new republican press self-consciously took upon itself the role of providing a medium for public discussion, which is reflected in the form by which journalists presented political news: “The Revolution transformed the political role of the press from the fitful public arguments and occasional controversial expressions of the colonial era into something new: a full theater of deliberation.”<sup>69</sup> The greater role that the press was now playing in the communication of Election Day—in the interpretation of its results, in describing its elements, and in providing a script for the performers through partisan polemics—can be taken as one element in the creation of the new body politic.

The arguments of writers like Leonard and Barnhurst and Nerone do not contradict earlier claims of the importance of newspapers in partisan culture, but they do place them in a different light. They suggest that party editors and correspondence were not simply promoting factional interests, but were instilling a certain vision of American public culture, more broadly defined. In their role as polemicists, journalists were creating a distinct image of the public, implied as much by the form of the news and the style of argument as by the actual content.<sup>70</sup> By presenting Election Day in the partisan style and form that they did, early American journalists helped readers understand what the day meant, and how it could be used to give meaning to their political world.

Take, for example, the newspaperman’s efforts, on the day of the vote itself, to prod the reader into action. This was a common element in the Federalist press, much

more so than in the city's colonial era. On the day of the first vote for representatives to the Federal Congress, the normally staid *Pennsylvania Gazette* hoped that "the federalists will THIS DAY be active, and adhere firmly to their cause. It will be in vain that they have discussed and defended the constitution, if they relinquish it at the important crisis of the election. Let no man stay at home, but let each manfully do his own duty, and exhort his neighbor to do the same... Let us take care we don't rue tomorrow the inactivity of today."<sup>71</sup> Even writers who were not so explicitly partisan nevertheless urged a healthy turnout at the polls. Although he would not "presume" to dictate a ticket to readers, A VOTER, in a 1782 edition of the *Independent Gazetteer*, nevertheless warned them that "unless some spirited and nervous measures are taken at the ensuing election, our boasted rights as freemen, and that felicity which sprung from this present, virtuous, struggle, will immediately expire."<sup>72</sup> Several years later, a correspondent to the *Aurora* cautioned citizens on Election Day that they were summoned "to choose between liberty or slavery—so critical, so alarming is your situation, that upon the change of men in government depends your Republic,"<sup>73</sup> and further down the page, SLEEP ironically counseled, "let us sleep on but for a few elections more and we never again shall have the trouble of appointing our rulers, they themselves will relieve us of that disagreeable task, by performing the office for us."<sup>74</sup>

This call to arms was only part of the newspaper's organizational role. Lists of party slates and tickets abounded in the pages of Philadelphia's newspapers and prior to an Election Day by the 1790s.<sup>75</sup> Newspapers also served to warn readers of tricks that the opposition was likely to play in order

to steal the election from honest Americans, and sometimes urged readers to stay on the grounds and keep an eye on the other side, an early and informal practice that would become institutionalized in the nineteenth century through “committees of surveillance.”<sup>76</sup> Supporters of Thomas McKean in the 1799 gubernatorial election warned that the Federalist James Ross—described as a Deist, a British partisan, and a monarchist—would be elected if Republicans stayed at home, were negligent or timid on the election grounds, or failed to detect and prevent frauds. “Look well to your tickets!” the writer commanded

Look well to your boxes!  
Look well to your Tallies!  
Look well to your Return!<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, on the day of the General Election of 1796, the republican *Aurora* contained calls for faithful Republicans to get to the polls, and to keep watch on the “Tories,” and the “British Faction,” who were plotting to steal the election.<sup>78</sup>

Yet despite the very public existence of political factionalism throughout the period, partisanship was still a problem, as Philadelphians post-revolution were no more disposed to think highly of party than they had been prior to it. Historians have noted that a distrust of party generally is evident in American political rhetoric until at least the 1820s, and continues in fits and starts even after that. For those who still believed that politics should be a disinterested search for the common public good, the existence of party was an affront.<sup>79</sup> Washington’s farewell address contained an explicit attack on party.<sup>80</sup> Madison decried the existence of faction and party in the

Federalist Papers, and argued that one advantage of a federal system was that it would mitigate the evils of faction, although probably not reduce them entirely.<sup>81</sup>

The distrust was not simply limited to the political elite. Popular election rhetoric tended to assume the evil of “the cloven hoof” of party and faction, arguing that “The spirit of party is the Spirit of enmity,” and that “[t]he man of party is a man of violence.”<sup>82</sup> Annoyed voters like “A.B.,” writing for the *Pennsylvania Packet*, worried about partisans closing off the “avenues” to the Election Grounds, and using other tricks to keep men from giving their votes. “[B]ecause I am a peaceable, modest man,” he asked, “and cannot kick constitutionalists and elbow republicans out of way, must I be disfranchized?”<sup>83</sup> Another voter counseled, “in short, let there be one prevailing idea with electors, that all prejudice must be baneful,”<sup>84</sup> and a report from the city’s 1787 election ground, amid the “claps and huzzas” of the party men, cheering on their champions, noted how supporters of the proposed new federal union had argued that one of its advantages would be to dismantle party and faction. “[B]ut mark the result—not a man was chosen without the pale of the republican association, and the name of a respectable citizen was lost in the echoes of *no, no*—because he has hitherto been esteemed an advocate for the constitution of Pennsylvania.”<sup>85</sup> When people went from house to house cajoling, begging, even insisting on votes—even extorting promises for them—then surely the sacred purity of the ballot, as a measurement of the people’s will, could not be assured.<sup>86</sup> Election Day, as not only the moment when the public came together as a collection of freemen but as a moment that most dramatically highlighted party, was worrisome, to say the least.

The solution to the evident existence of party alongside its clear injunction was simple. One did not impute party to one's own faction. The opposition was a party: one's friends were simply patriots. Hence, an attack on party and faction in the *Pennsylvania Evening Herald* ended with the recommendation of a ticket promoting the "friends of equal liberty," the preferred self-description of the state's early republican faction.<sup>87</sup> A ticket promoting Constitutionalist candidates, on the other hand, was described as THE FRIENDS OF HARMONY.<sup>88</sup> Later, Republicans of the Federalist would often eschew the party label in favor of calling their slate the "Ticket to support the Rights of Man."<sup>89</sup> (One result of this attitude was that labels were often undependable descriptions of political loyalties: "republican" not only meant a conservative in 1785 and a radical in 1792, but it could also mean different things at the same time. When Benjamin Bache attempted to claim a Congressional victory in Boston for the Jeffersonian Republicans, Federalist John Fenno replied, "That Messrs. SKINNER and SEWALL are Republicans, and *Federal* Republicans too, is a truth well known to electors of both Districts. Mr. Williams [a third successful Boston candidate] is a also a Federal Republican."<sup>90</sup>)

The public sympathies of factions toward foreign powers in the Federalist era helped the partisan writer further separate the opposition from loyal Americans and from the sphere of honest and constructive debate. Republicans were not merely friendly to the French state. In the articles of many Federalist polemicists, they were assumed to be in the pay and under the total control of the French: in other words, traitors. This was a favorite charge of William Cobbett, for example: "The leaders of

the Frenchified party in the United States, do not despair of final success, they expect yet to accomplish their horrid view, by means of French intrigue.”<sup>91</sup>

It is now evident, that, in spite of all the “promises of “unanimity”; in spite of all the pretended converts of federalism; in spite of all disguise, excuses and palliations, it is now evident, that there is still a faction in this country, and a numerous and powerful faction too, who are ready and willing to acknowledge the right of France to govern these unfortunate states.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, Federalists were often identified as British agents, or the “British party.” “Good master FENNO,” wrote one opponent of the Jay treaty just prior to the 1796 election period, “you and your noble patrons the knights of the funding and banking systems, the old Tories and the British emissaries, may say *amen*.”<sup>93</sup> Another writer in the *Aurora* noted “the British faction” was composed of “apostate Whigs, old Tories, toad eaters of government, British riders and runners, speculators, stockjobbers, bank directors, mushroom merchants,” and recommended “genteel clubbings” for all such men.<sup>94</sup>

As the moment when the two groups met each other on the field of battle, Election Day was often an especially effective element in the party’s rhetorical war of words. Opponents could be identified on the Election grounds by their ignoble and mean behavior, and defeat at the polls was often the result of chicanery on the part of traitors in league with foreign agents, seeking to take control of the republic. Money generally also played a role in the defeats of Republicans, according to their journalists. Somewhat disappointed in results of the 1795 election, the pro-Jeffersonian *Aurora* blamed its losses in the city on “the influence of wealth and the industry of religious secretaries.”<sup>95</sup> What the election proved, wrote the editors, was

“the dangerous monied influence that is every day gaining fresh strength among us; it proves that the exertions of those merchants and others who brought gangs of sailors, draymen and porters to the election ground and passed off their votes, had greater success, than such a vile cause and such vile means merited.”<sup>96</sup> A week later, the paper compared the voters in the county, where the Jeffersonians had done well, with those in Philadelphia itself. County voters were largely mechanics and farmers, men of an independent cast of mind and a love of freedom. City voters were full of British agents, of those whose livelihood left them open to the dictates of the bankers, and of course, of lovers of wealth, who wished to re-establish rank in the new democratic republic.<sup>97</sup>

By contrast, a Republican victory in Baltimore three years later was described as follows in the pages of the Federalist *Porcupine's Gazette*:

This night will end our four days election, which SMITH, to the infamy of our district, will be chosen by a large majority of a melancholy record of jacobin triumph over the friends of government and its administration. His being a Major General of the militia, and the lavish distribution which has been made of money, in every quarter, for the use of the vulgar, has had an influence not to be controlled by reason or justice. Great preparations are made for the celebration of SMITH'S success, this night. Several pipes of wine are taken to the commons for the populace to regale with. A triumphal chair is made on purpose, and great illuminations prepared by the democrats of our city. In short, the election has been attended by bloodshed and mobs. The peaceable voters have been driven from the hustings. The country parties, against SMITH, were, as they came in, met by mobs, stoned, brick-batted, and knocked off their horses. In a word, it has been a perfect Paris election, and SMITH may be looked upon as the MARAT of our city.”<sup>98</sup>

Another Federalist writer, this time describing an election in South Amboy, New Jersey, accused “Jacobins” from New York of bribing voters with brandy and

cheese. “We have read of a Judas which betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver but we never before read of an hundred men who were prevailed upon to sell their Saviour, and their country for a *piece of cheese and dram of brandy.*”<sup>99</sup>

Whether true or not, what these sorts of accusations did was to arouse suspicion not only about the methods of the opposition, but the very character of the opposition. The mediated performance of Election Day became a way to undercut not simply the policy claims of opponents but their moral legitimacy. Thus, the meaning of the Federalist Election Day performance was always somewhat unstable. A moment when the public illustrated the moral superiority of the new regime and the new society that it had created, it could easily, in the hands of a partisan polemicist, be used to indicate the very opposite.

#### Election Day, 1796:

Given the partisan context, the use of public celebration and ritual to create a vision of the culture that was both a national and a contested one, the changing role of the press, and the use of Election Day to create an image of the voting public, we can now better understand how the Election Day of 1796 served as a moment for Philadelphia’s enfranchised citizens to perform an image of the public before themselves.

The stage for the performance was set several months earlier. In the late summer of 1796, readers of Philadelphia’s *Aurora* newspaper were warned of a “detestable and nefarious conspiracy” now existing in the republic, whose aim was to



lead, if possible, to monarchy. An as yet un-named and shadowy cabal was taking advantage of the President Washington's "exaggerated fame" to forward its designs. "Let the people awake—let them no longer be, by their prejudice in favor of a Washington, lulled into an insensibility to the danger which threatens them."<sup>100</sup> Republicans were anxious for Washington to declare that he would step down as soon as possible, so that open electioneering could begin. Already by that spring, John Beckley, an ardent Republican and a friend to several of the prominent faction leaders, including Jefferson, had written to a correspondent that "Jefferson will certainly be run for president, and certainly accept if elected."<sup>101</sup> In fact, Beckley saw in Washington's delay a partisan attempt to give the Republicans as short a time as possible to mount a campaign.<sup>102</sup>

By early October, prior to the city's General Election, the *Aurora's* correspondent warned readers that the "[t]he Janus head of Aristocracy," was overpowering the "fair face of Republicanism," and called on readers to come to the aid of the Republic. "Would you beget slaves!!" FOLIO challenged his fellow citizens, urging that they were the only ones who could prostrate the monster of tyranny and aristocracy.<sup>103</sup> On October 11, the day of the General Election, writers in the *Aurora* warned of dark tricks that would be tried by the British faction. NO TORY wrote of a group of carpenters and laborers from a frigate (echoing the distant events of 1742) hired to vote *en masse* for Federalist congressional candidate Robert Waln.<sup>104</sup> Another writer warned against fraud and noted that "[s]ome inspectors have been guilty of slyly inspecting the ballots when delivered, and according to their

completion objected to the qualifications of the voters, or received them without scrutiny. This violation of the right of ballot should be prevented by the close attention of every friend to fair election.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite these dastardly attempts, Republicans of the county and city did well in the Congressional races, and several days following the vote, Bache interpreted the results as favorable to enemies of the Jay Treaty and supporters of the Republican cause: “If an circumstance can speak the condemnation of the British Treaty more unequivocally than the continuation of British piracies, it is the issue of the late elections in Philadelphia City and County.”<sup>106</sup> We can see here an important change in the role of the journalist vis-à-vis Election Day. Unlike the colonial newspaperman, the editor of the 1790s felt comfortable interpreting the meaning of the Election Day for his readers. Bache’s returns and his discussions of them defined results as pro and anti-republican, thus casting the event as an explicit partisan battle.<sup>107</sup>

At the same time, the *Aurora* was publishing constant attacks on Adams, accusing him of being a monarchist and a British sympathizer, as in this letter from Thomas Paine:

JOHN, it is known was always a speller after places and offices, and never thought his services were highly enough paid...[he] is one of those men who never contemplated the origin of government, or comprehended any thing of first principles. If he had, he must have seen that the right to set up and establish hereditary government never did, and never can, exist in any generation at any time whatever; that it is the nature of Treason.<sup>108</sup>

For their part, Federalists, in a series of articles written by PHOCION (a pseudonym of William Cobbett), attacked Jefferson as a Deist, as a coward, as a slave-owner, as a

wild-eyed anarchist and a lover of “Jacobinism,” and as a phony in his pretensions to the title of philosopher.<sup>109</sup>

While this battle in the press was going on, John Beckley was busy flooding the state with ballots listing Jefferson’s electors. After alerting his contacts with a letter, Beckley would follow up with bags of Jeffersonian tickets delivered on horseback. His friends were expected to supplement these by writing out tickets en masse and passing them on to voters on Election Day. The strategy was to move from the more republican rural and Western areas, toward the more urban Eastern parts of the state, where the Federalist forces were much more powerful. The riders were timed to return back to the Philadelphia itself only days before the election, so that Federalist leaders would not be able to respond to Beckley’s stratagem.<sup>110</sup>

By the last week of the campaign, an *Aurora* writer was ready to declare that the “present moment is a crisis—On its proper use depends the liberty and happiness of our common country...The question is no less than whether monarchy or republicanism shall obtain among us?...I will go further, People of America, and declare that MR. ADAMS is an enemy to all regular government. Nothing short of actual despotism seems to accord with his wishes.”<sup>111</sup> A handbill was distributed the before the election accusing Adams of being a “professed champion of the British constitution,” an “enthusiastic friend of hereditary power,” and a “declared enemy of republicanism.” It further charged the “friends of Mr. Adams” with having “framed a ticket correspondent to their wishes, and this ticket they have denominated the Jefferson ticket, and have palmed it upon the numbers of republicans under that

treacherous garb.”<sup>112</sup> Federalists made a counter-charge: that the Republicans were trying to pass off their ticket as one friendly to the beliefs of President Washington.<sup>113</sup>

Four days before the Presidential vote, the *Aurora*'s editor, Benjamin Franklin Bache, printed a letter from the French Minister to the American government, Pierre Adet, informing the reading public that the French government took a dim view of the United States' attitude toward both its former friend, and hinting that should current policies continue, war between the two states was a very real possibility.<sup>114</sup> Adet's letter threw the journalistic and political classes into an uproar. It was reprinted, and condemned, by pro-Adams journals like the Federalist leaning *Gazette of the United States*. Federalist politicians were furious with the timing of the letter. They strongly suspected that it was an attempt on the part of the radical republicans, in league with their French foreign sympathizers, to throw the election to Jefferson. Some argued that it amounted to foreign interference in American domestic affairs.<sup>115</sup>

On Thursday, the eve of the election, citizens fought each other in the streets of Philadelphia. The immediate cause of the disturbance was the appearance of a group of about 150 men, marching down Market Street to the beat of drums, wearing tricolored ribbons in their hats. The marchers were ostensibly calling for higher wages, but Samuel Coates, a prominent Quaker merchant, did not believe it. Philadelphians understood the political meaning of the red, white and blue cockades. Coates, a Federalist who favored John Adams for chief executive of the nation, wrote to a friend the next day that the crowd had been the result of schemes by “some violent Jacobins or foreign Incendiaries, to overcome the moderate Citizens and prevent their votes at

the Election.” After a time, the paraders began preparing a flag proclaiming Thomas Jefferson a “man of the people.” Soon afterward, however, they were set upon by city notables—including Robert Wharton and several “spirited Aldermen.” Clubs and knives were brought out, and about 40 rioters landed in jail—“much hurt,” Coates added with evident satisfaction, “and I hope while they are employed in Contemplating the fruits of their folly...we shall hold a quick Election and choose good Federal men.”<sup>116</sup> The mayor forbade display of the flag. That same day, Fenno’s *Gazette* published a letter from three prominent city lawyers—William Lewis, William Rawle, and Jared Ingersoll—that the state’s constitution excluded non-nationalized voters from the polls.<sup>117</sup> The pro-Federalist Coates saw this as a victory for the supporters of the administration, assuming that many of the city’s radicals came from its foreign elements.<sup>118</sup>

One thing that all of this partisan activity seems to have done was create a great deal of interest in the Election Day. Four years earlier, one city paper had noted that the “importance of an approaching election of a President and Vice President of the United States did not appear to draw forth the activity of our citizens, on monday last, to vote for electors—The choice of an intermediate body appeared to remove from their attention the ultimate and important result of the election.”<sup>119</sup> In contrast, Elizabeth Drinker, the wife of a wealthy Philadelphia Quaker merchant, noted in her journal for Nov. 5, 1796: “This is the day of Election for a President—a matter of great moment.”<sup>120</sup> The excitement in turn produced a fairly impressive turnout. Walter Dean Burnham has estimated the national turnout for the 1796 Presidential Elections

was around 20 per cent of eligible voters.<sup>121</sup> In Philadelphia, the number was well over 50 per cent.<sup>122</sup>

In addition, if the grumblings of disaffected Federalist politicians are to be believed, there was also a great deal of partisan performance on the day. William Smith noted that, due accusations of Adams's monarchical sympathies, voters had been on the election grounds yelling, "Jefferson and no King."<sup>123</sup> Federalists such as John Fenno took a dim view of such extravagant behavior.

The shoutings of "*liberty and equality*," the mercenary cries of "no king," which disgraced a last election, are so closely copied from the proceedings in France which first prepared and afterward established the arbitrary power of ROBESPIERRE, that there is no little reason to apprehend a similar tyranny in this country, if those succeed, who are now so closely copying and have always vindicated the preparatory steps which led to the despotism of that monster and man-slayer—When *popular tyranny* shall trample on the necks of the wealthy and industrious, *then* they will begin to wrythe, and struggle to life, but it will be *too late*; a *guillotine* will silence them, and their property become, by confiscations, the prey of plundering demagogues.<sup>124</sup>

William Smith railed against the "French flags, French cockades were displayed by the Jefferson party and there is no doubt that French money was not spared. Public houses were kept open. At Kensington the mob would suffer no person to vote who had not a French cockade in his hat," evidence enough, Smith was sure, of French money and French influence.<sup>125</sup> Chauncey Goodrich noted reports of "supporters of the Jefferson ticket as 'tis named, went to the polls with French cockades in their hats at Philadelphia." Goodrich added that "the mob of that city, led on by their knavish purse-proud democrats, are ripe for any outrage upon decency and a government of laws. It is probably that nothing but some calamity from the hands of Sans Culottism

can thoroughly reform them.”<sup>126</sup> The scandal of the Philadelphia election reached as far as the *State Gazette of North Carolina*, in which a writer from Philadelphia described the day as exhibiting “considerable symptoms of riot...evidently cherished and promoted by the French Minster’s intrigues and money.” The writer also noted that, “Today a flag is to be paraded, representing the union of the two Republics, with this motto, “JEFFERSON AND NO KING,” concluding, “Great God, if this is the fruit of French fraternity, deliver us from such a cause.”<sup>127</sup>

Federalist belief in French intrigue grew louder as the returns came in and the victory of the Republicans in the city seemed certain. “We are unfortunate in the Election in this State: we carried only two of our Ticket. The most unwearied Exertions, accompanied by some Bribery, and not a little chicane, have been practiced on this occasion by the anti-federal Party.”<sup>128</sup> Presaging attacks by later generation on the effect of media effects upon voter behavior, many Federalists seemed certain that not only French money but also the foreign interference of Adet’s letter had caused Quakers, in particular, to change their votes. “If Mr. Jefferson is elected it will be owing entirely to the influence of that paper.”<sup>129</sup>

Calls of trickery from both sides grew as the returns began to trickle in from other parts of the state, or rather, failed to. At a certain point, the status of the returns themselves became part of the ongoing story. Commonwealth law required that the official returns be sent to the Governors office by November 18 in order to be counted. On that date, the returns from several far western counties had still not been received. These counties were expected to go strongly for the Republicans, and with the

Federalist ticket now narrowly ahead, they could very possibly make the decisive difference.<sup>130</sup> Federalists argued the governor had to obey the constitution and ignore the uncoun­ted ballots, Republicans urged that he wait several more days. Governor Thomas Mifflin in the end decided to suspend the counting of the votes until the Western counties were in. Mifflin was generally considered above party divisions, but his secretary, Alexander Dallas, was a known Republican sympathizer, and Federalists charged the governor's office had been driven by partisanship. Republicans hinted, in turn, that Federalist post office managers had deliberately held up the returns.<sup>131</sup> When the western returns finally did come in, they were overwhelmingly in favor of the Republicans, resulting in a state electoral ticket that largely voted for Jefferson.<sup>132</sup>

#### Conclusion:

The 1796 vote for president was a method of communicating a national political identity to the citizens of Philadelphia, a national ritual, in an era when few other forms of communication existed that could have performed this function, or at least performed it so well. Through casting his vote, the citizen tied himself to a set of men and of principles, and to a particular symbol in which man and principle met, the Presidential candidate. The ritual's ability to link the individual citizen to a partisan worldview, through the concrete symbol of the candidate, meant among things that Philadelphians had turned the Electoral College into an anachronism only seven years after its creation. Voters on Nov. 4, 1796 did not go to the state house expecting to choose some group of wise men. They were picking a President. Before Washington



ever announced his farewell, the *Aurora* had informed its readers that it “requires no divination to decide who will be the candidates for the chair. THOMAS JEFFERSON & JOHN ADAMS will be the men.”<sup>133</sup> This understanding is evident enough in the reaction to Federalist Samuel Miles, one of the earliest “faithless electors.” When Miles decided to vote for Jefferson, he provoked the following letter of outrage to the *Gazette of the U.S.* “What, do I chuse Samuel Miles to determine for me whether John Adams or Thomas Jefferson shall be President? No! I chuse him to *act*, not to think!”<sup>134</sup>

The vote tied the voter to the nation, as he enacted that declaration of political power and identity in concert with others throughout the new country. What the Election Day march, or the cockade, or the public declaration at the state house did that the vote did not, was to signal this status to the observing crowd. In other words, the cockade was the public method of communicating the message the vote had sent to the voter alone. Federalists and Republicans thus were able to distinguish themselves not through their private decisions merely—which had no use as markers separating friend from foe—but their public conduct on the Election Grounds.

But the celebration and the vote could not have communicated these messages without the help of the mass media. It was not just that the press gave voters a set of partisan symbols and arguments through which to understand the contest, and with which to interpret the event itself. It was that the press allowed this local action to be understood as part of a national clash of forces: stability and anarchy, aristocracy and

democracy. The growth of the press, both in its size and social role, was essential for the ritual to communicate an *American* identity to the performers.

Presidential Election Day 1796 was different from other Election Days in Philadelphia of the early republic, not only in the office that was being contested but in the forms that were used to mark it. Other election days do not seem to have featured marches and cockades. Because the election of 1796 fell in the midst of a larger set of cultural practices in use at the time, it took on something of their character. Nevertheless, it was not the only Election Day that served, both in its actual performance and its mediated representation, to provide an image of the public to itself, whether that was the sight of militia men marching lock step to the polls to deposit their ballots, or Tory sympathizers ripping up liberty trees, or partisan electioneers bothering other citizens on their way to the polls. At some level, the performers and the audience seemed to be aware that Election Day was becoming something of a democratic spectacle. On the event of the 1799 General Election, a journalist noted that the street in front of the state house had been crowded with carriages, as observers from as far way as Trenton, NJ, had ridden in for the day to observe the scene.<sup>135</sup>

Like the colonial Election Day, however, as a symbol of the public, Election Day did not always provide a comfortable image. In the hands of a talented journalist like William Cobbett, who didn't think much of the American experiment in any case, it could be used to illustrate the baseness and the dangerous mob tendencies of democratic government. Alternatively, a radical like Benjamin Bache could twist the

losses of the Republicans into a message about the inherent corruption of the Federalist faction.

There were other, uncomfortable features of Philadelphia's Election Day during this period, which had carried over from the colonial era. The practice of forming a partisan ticket, even more common after the revolution than before it, continued to grate. One writer, announcing a public meeting to form a slate, rather apologetically noted that, "It is, perhaps, to be regretted, that the practice of framing tickets, before an election, so generally prevails, but it must be obvious to every reflecting person, that whole the practice does obtain, he must make a choice of the tickets proposed, or throw away his vote."<sup>136</sup> Newspapers always made certain that they did not present their own side's ticket as having been decided by a group of politicians, but the result of a public meeting of ordinary citizens, "suggesting" or "proposing" the slate to their fellow patriots.<sup>137</sup> These devices were easily seen through, and one Federalist poetaster had some fun in the 1796 campaign mocking the egalitarian pretensions of Republican leaders, who felt "the people" should rule, but only under their direction.<sup>138</sup> (However, by the turn of the century, many of the qualms about distributing tickets had disappeared in the pages of the newspapers. William Duane, who took over the *Aurora* following the 1798 death of Bache from yellow fever, had no problem on the General Election of 1800 informing his readers which bar they were to go to in order to pick up their reliable Republican tickets.<sup>139</sup>)

The early Election Day's of the republic, in other words, seemed to be at once altogether too democratic, and too aristocratic. This should not be surprising. The

public culture of Philadelphia itself was attempting to understand what the implications of the revolution might be, during this time, for the public life of the city. It is only to be expected that something like Election Day, which so prominently displayed the public to itself, would end up as confused and contested as the rest of society: populist and elitist at the same time, a moment of integration and of division, a practice that drew on an ideology of universalism but managed to keep a great many of the city's residents from the polls. In struggling with what this performance meant, Philadelphians in the next century would begin to change not only the day itself, but the wider culture of which it was a part.

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<sup>1</sup> For general accounts of the electoral politics of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia at this time, see: Robert L. Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1942); Bernard Fay, "Early party machinery in the United States: Pennsylvania in the election of 1796," *PMH& B*, 60(4), 1936, pp. 375-390; Bernard Fay, *The two Franklins: fathers of American democracy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933) especially pp. 211 ff; Harry Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790-1801, a study in national stimulus and local response* (Philadelphia: np, 1950); Richard Miller, *Philadelphia—the Federalist city: a study of urban politics, 1789-1801* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1976); Robert Dinkin, *Voting in Revolutionary America: a study of Elections in the original 13 colonies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 31, 32, 69-72; Jackson Main, *Political parties before the constitution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1973) pp. 174-211; Roland M. Baumann, *The Democratic-Republicans of Pennsylvania, The Origins, 1776-1797*, Ph.D. dissertation, 1970, Pennsylvania State University; and Raymond Walters, Jr. "The origins of the Jeffersonian party in Pennsylvania," *PMH&B*, 66(4) 1942, pp. 440-458.

<sup>2</sup> Tully, *Forming American Politics*, pp. 407-413. See also Moisei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the organization of political parties* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), pp. 6,7.

<sup>3</sup> Albrecht Koschnik, "Political conflict and public contest: rituals of national celebration in Philadelphia, 1788-1815," *PMH&B*, 118(3), 1994, pp. 209, 243; for a more general treatment of the role of celebrations and rituals in the production of American nationality, see Simon Newman, *Parades and the politics of the street: festive culture in the early American public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and David Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes*. For discussions of earlier celebrations during the revolutionary period, and their development out of traditional English practices, see Waldstreicher, "Rites of rebellion, rites of assent: celebrations, print culture, and the origins of American nationalism," *The Journal of American History*, 82(1), 1995, pp. 37-61; and Robert Middlekauff, "The ritualization of the American revolution, in *The development of American culture*, eds. Stanley Coben, Lorman Ratner (New York: St. Martin's, 1983) pp. 43-57.

<sup>4</sup> Koschnik, "Rituals of national celebration," p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 234, 235; Newman, *Parades and politics*, pp. 89-91, 94-98; Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes*, pp. 201, 202.

<sup>6</sup> Koschnik, "Rituals of national celebration," p. 210; Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes*, pp. 1-9.

- <sup>7</sup> Jackson Main, *Political parties before the revolution*, pp. 32, 33; Robert J. Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: a history of election practices* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1989) pp. 5, 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Brunhouse, *Counter-revolution in PA*, pp. 10-17; Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, pp. 174-211; Main, *Political parties before the Constitution*, Table 7-2, p. 196.
- <sup>9</sup> Marc W. Kruman, *Between authority and liberty: state constitution making in revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991) pp. 24-28; Williamson, *American suffrage*, pp. 92-97.
- <sup>10</sup> Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution in PA*, pp. 42-44; Main, *Political parties before the Constitution*, pp. 177-186. Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, country, and class: the Philadelphia militia and the "lower sort" during the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers's University Press, 1987) pp. 89, 90 provides an account of the early arguments over the Constitution and the expanded franchise.
- <sup>11</sup> Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution in PA*, pp. 68-76; Main, *Political parties before the constitution*, p. 181.
- <sup>12</sup> Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution in PA*, pp. 202-211.
- <sup>13</sup> Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in PA*, p. 71, argues that the state system morphed fairly easily into a national partisan culture; Baumann, *Democratic-Republicans*, on the other hand, makes the case that the leaders of the state and national factions, and the issues which provoked them, were significantly different, pp. 574-590.
- <sup>14</sup> For an account of Republican's ideological construction of their enemies, see Marshall Smelser, "The Jacobin Phrenzy: the menace of monarchy, plutocracy, and anglophilia," *The Review of Politics*, 21(1) 1957, pp. 239-258; See the attacks on Federalists or political conservatives in Hambden. *To the Freemen of the City of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia, Oct. 9, 1792. (Broadside, Evans 46585); *To the Electors of Pennsylvania: Take Your Choice!* Philadelphia, 1799 (Broadside, Evans 36423).; CLEON, *Aurora and General Advertiser* (hereafter *Aurora*) Oct. 24, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> For the review of Republican and Federalist ideologies, I have relied on Dinkin, *Voting in revolutionary America*, pp. 7,8; Douglass G. Adair, *The Intellectual origins of Jeffersonian democracy: republicanism, the class struggle, and the virtuous farmer* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2000); and Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of honor: national politics in the new republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) pp. xix, 216.
- <sup>16</sup> Fay, *The two Franklins*, pp. 136-140.
- <sup>17</sup> Tinkcom, *Republicans and Federalists in PA*, pp. 142-44, 199; Fay, *The two Franklins*, pp. 228-249; Miller, *Philadelphia—the Federalist city*, pp. 70-79.
- <sup>18</sup> Miller, *Philadelphia—the Federalist city*, pp. 71, 72. James D. Tagg, "Benjamin Franklin Bache's Attack on George Washington," *PMH&B*, 100(2) 1976, pp. 191-93, argues that the Jay Treaty was a major reason why an originally loyal Bache moved into the camp of the President's enemies.
- <sup>19</sup> Miller, *Philadelphia—the Federalist city*, pp. 61-62; Tinkcom, *Republicans and Federalist in PA*, pp. 152-53.
- <sup>20</sup> Fay, *The two Franklins*, pp. 172-93; Baumann, *Democratic-Republicans of PA*, pp.423-430; Miller, *Philadelphia—The Federalist City*, pp. 53-56.
- <sup>21</sup> Tinkcom, *Republicans and Federalists in PA*, pp. 81-87; Eugene Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); John L. Brooke, "Ancient Lodges and self-created societies: voluntary association in the public sphere in the early republic," in *Launching the "Extended Republic": the Federalist era*, Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert, eds. (Charlottesville, VA: University Presses of Virginia, 1996) pp. 273-259; the antagonistic attitude toward these groups—among Washington and other Federalists—is noted in Brooke, pp. 317, 318; and Michael Schudson, "Sending a political message: lessons from the American 1790s," *Media, culture, and society*, 19(3) 1997, pp. 315-318.
- <sup>22</sup> Link, *Democratic-Republican societies*, pp. 90, 112; Tinkcom, *Republicans and Federalists in PA*, p. 184; James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, pp. 379-382.
- <sup>23</sup> Sloane, "The early party press: the newspaper role in American politics, 1788-1812," *Journalism History*, 9(1) pp. 18-23; Jerry Knudson, "Political journalism in the age of Jefferson," *Journalism History*, 1(1) 1974, pp. 20-23.

- <sup>24</sup> Donald Stewart, *The opposition press of the federalist period* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1969); Arthur Scherr, "'Vox Populi' versus the patriot President: Benjamin Franklin Bache's Philadelphia Aurora and John Adams," *PA History*, 62(4) 1995, pp. 503-531; William Reitzel, "William Cobbett and Philadelphia journalism: 1794-1800," *PA History*, 59(3) 1935, pp. 223-244; Elwyn Burns, "The dynamics of American journalism from 1787 to 1865," *PMH&B*, 61(4) 1937, pp. 435-445; Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*; Karen List, *The role of William Cobbett in Philadelphia Party Press, 1794-1799* (Columbia, S.C.: AEMCJ, 1983); William David Sloane, "Examining the Dark Ages concept: the Federalist-Republican Press as a model," *The Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 7(2) 1982, pp. 105-119; Sloane, "The early party press"; Knudson, "Political journalism in the age of Jefferson."
- <sup>25</sup> Appleby, *Inheriting the revolution: the first generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2000); Wood, *The radicalism on the American revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
- <sup>26</sup> Wood, *The radicalism of the American revolution*, p. 5.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229-290.
- <sup>28</sup> Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes*, p. 2. A description of the parade is found in *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 9, 1788, pp. 1-3; and is referred to in *ibid.*, pp. 1, 2; Newman, *Parades and the politics of the street*, pp. 40-42; see also Koschnik, "Rituals of national celebration," p. 214.
- <sup>29</sup> Richard Sennett, *The fall of public man* (New York: Norton, 1976) p. 40
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 65-72.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 9, 1788, pp. 2, 3.
- <sup>32</sup> Newman, *Parades and the politics of the street*, pp. 146-47, 154-61; Koschnik, "Rituals of national celebration," pp. 227.
- <sup>33</sup> Note from Minister Adet, *CITIZENS, Aurora*, Nov. 5, 1796, p. 2.
- <sup>34</sup> Cited in Koschnik, "Rituals of national celebration," p. 237
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, note 64, p. 237.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- <sup>37</sup> Waldstreicher, *In the midst of perpetual fetes*, pp. 200-201.
- <sup>38</sup> Waldstreicher, "Celebrations, print culture, and nationalism," p. 39.
- <sup>39</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July. 9, 1788, cited in *The Documentary history of the first Federal elections, 1788-1790*, vol. 1, eds. Merrill Jensen and Robert A. Becker (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1976), p. 241-42.
- <sup>40</sup> "A Freeman to the citizens of Pennsylvania," *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 8, 1788: cited in Jensen and Becker, *Documentary history*, vol. 1, p. 309.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Pennsylvania Evening Herald and The American Monitor* (hereafter *The Pennsylvania Evening Herald*) Oct. 12, 1785, p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> Section Six, Constitution of Pennsylvania, 1776 *Constitutions of Pennsylvania and the Constitution of the United States* (Harrisburg, Legislative Reference Bureau: 1916), p. 226
- <sup>43</sup> Article Three, Section 1, Constitution of Pennsylvania, 1790, *Constitutions of Pennsylvania*, p. 188.
- <sup>44</sup> Williamson, *American suffrage*, pp. 96-97.
- <sup>45</sup> "Extract from Convention minutes." Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention. *In Convention for the state of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia, 1776. (Broadside, Evans 14983).
- <sup>46</sup> Elmer Ellsworth Schulz Johnson, *The test act of June 3, 1777* (Norristown, PA: The Pennsylvania German Society, 1930) vol. 38, pp. 9-22; Williamson, *American suffrage*, p. 96; Benjamin Rush, *Considerations upon the present test-law of Pennsylvania: addressed to the legislature and freemen of the state*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Philadelphia: Hall and Sellers, 1785); Brunhouse, *The counter-revolution*, pp. 16, 40, 41. Dinkin, *Voting in Revolutionary America*, p. 43, notes that several other states had similar laws disenfranchising Loyalists directly by law, or indirectly through oaths.
- <sup>47</sup> Brunhouse, *Counter-revolution*, p. 16; Williamson, *American Suffrage*, p. 96
- <sup>48</sup> *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Sept. 17, 1776. p. 2.; see also A PLAIN DEALER. *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 3, 1778. p. 3; AN ELECTOR OF PHILADELPHIA. *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 13, 1778. p. 2

- <sup>49</sup> The Nuetown event is mentioned in an October, 1776, letter from Lt. Col. William Baxter to the revolutionary Council of Safety, *PA Archives*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, vol. 5, p. 31; the Lewes incident is recounted in an Oct. 25, 1776, letter from Henry Fisher to the Council, *ibid.*, p. 53.
- <sup>50</sup> Rush, *Considerations*, p. 5; Pennsylvania General Assembly. *To the citizens of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia, 1784. (Broadside, Evan 18714).
- <sup>51</sup> Brunhouse, *Counter-revolution*, p. 41
- <sup>52</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Nov. 13, 1776, p. 3; *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Nov. 12, 1776. p. 3.
- <sup>53</sup> Brunhouse, *Counter-revolution*, pp. 103-104, 154, 155, 165-67
- <sup>54</sup> See for example *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 13, 1778. p. 1.
- <sup>55</sup> Rush, *Considerations*, p. 4.
- <sup>56</sup> "Atticus," *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 6, 1790. p. 2.
- <sup>57</sup> Williamson, *American suffrage*, p. 6
- <sup>58</sup> See a 1790 petition of citizens to the Assembly. *To the honorable representatives....*, Philadelphia, Broadside (Evans no. 22938); PA General Assembly, 1784. *To the citizens of Pennsylvania*.
- <sup>59</sup> For defenses of the soldiers' right to vote, irregardless of taking the oath, see *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Oct. 13, 1779, p. 3; A FRIEND TO THE ARMY, *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 25, 1783. p. 2.
- <sup>60</sup> See for example PADDY THE QUAKER, *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 5, 1785. p. 3, an attack on the abuses of naturalization laws.
- <sup>61</sup> Hambden. *To the Freemen of the City of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia, Oct. 9, 1792. Broadside, (Evans 46585); Republican. "Fellow Citizens!" Philadelphia, Oct. 3, 1796. Broadside (Evans 30411); Atticus, *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 6, 1790. p. 2; A note to "Citizen Fenno," *Aurora*, Oct. 15, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>62</sup> SERIOUS ADVICE, *The Philadelphia Gazette*, Oct. 15, 1800, p. 3. See also "A Receipt to Make a Jacobin," *Philadelphia Gazette*, Aug. 5, 1800, p. 3, which includes charges of atheism, hypocrisy, and sedition. For a summary of the national rhetoric attacking both Adams and Jefferson, see Dinkin, *Campaigning in American*, pp. 20-24.
- <sup>63</sup> *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 12, 1785, p.3, cited in Dinkin, *Voting in revolution America*, p. 77, 78. The more radical constitutionalists, as the party of the common man and the mechanic (ie., urban working class), opposed the formation of a state bank, which was supported by wealthy merchants (and republicans) like Robert Morris.
- <sup>64</sup> Wilfred Binkley, *American political parties, their natural history* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 43.
- <sup>65</sup> Rush, *Considerations*, p. 11.
- <sup>66</sup> Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, 'The Petticoat electors: women's suffrage in New Jersey, 1776-1807, *Journal of the early republic*, 12(2) 1992, pp. 159-93; Henry C. Shinn, "An early New Jersey poll list," *PMH&B*, 44(1) 1920, pp. 77-81, shows two women's names, Iona Curtis (No. 114) and Selvenia Lilvey (213); the distinction of voters as freemen is found in Section Six, Constitution of Pennsylvania, 1776 *Constitutions of Pennsylvania*, p. 226
- <sup>67</sup> *The Philadelphia Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1800, p. 3. The article directly above this story notes that a young lady of Burlington county postponed her wedding in order to vote.
- <sup>68</sup> Leonard, *Power of the press*, pp. 33-49.
- <sup>69</sup> Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form of the news: a history* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000) p. 45.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.
- <sup>71</sup> PHILADELPHIA, *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Nov. 26, 1788, p. 3
- <sup>72</sup> *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 8, 1782. p. 2.
- <sup>73</sup> "Fellow Citizens," *Aurora*, Oct. 13, 1795, p. 3
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>75</sup> For examples from the 1796 race, see *Claypoole's Advertiser*, Oct. 29, 1796, p. 3; Nov. 2, p.3; *Aurora*, Nov. 1. p. 3; Nov. 2, p. 3, Nov. 3, p. 3; *New World*, Oct. 31, p. 3; *Gazette of the U.S.*, Oct. 22, p. 2.
- <sup>76</sup> NO TORY, and "Election Anecdote," *Aurora*, Oct. 11, 1796, pp. 2, 3; "A True Jacobin Trick," *The Philadelphia Gazette*, Oct. 28, 1800, p. 3.

- <sup>77</sup> *To the Electors of Pennsylvania: Take Your Choice!* Philadelphia, 1799 (Broadside, Evans 36423); reprinted in the *Aurora*, Oct. 8, 1799, p. 3.
- <sup>78</sup> "Look Out," *Aurora*, Oct. 11, 1796, pp. 2,3.
- <sup>79</sup> For discussions of how Americans attempted to negotiate a partisan culture during a period of continued distrust of partisanship, see Wilfred E. Binkley, *American parties: their natural history* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962) pp. 49-50; Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics, the early republic's political culture, 1789-1840" *The American Political Science Review*, 68(2) 1974, pp. 473-487. The generally negative attitude toward party is remarked upon in Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 64-69, and Joel Silbey, *The American political nation, 1838-1893* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 14-16.
- <sup>80</sup> "Farewell Address, September 19" in *The writings of George Washington*, vol. 35, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932) pp. 223-28.
- <sup>81</sup> *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961) No. 10.
- <sup>82</sup> *The Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Feb. 4, 1786, p. 3, source cited in Main, *Political parties*, p. 203; See also *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 15, 1785, p. 3.
- <sup>83</sup> "A.B. To the Freemen of Pennsylvania." *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 7, 1785. p. 2.
- <sup>84</sup> A CITIZEN. *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 4, 1783. p. 1.
- <sup>85</sup> *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 13, 1787, p. 3.
- <sup>86</sup> *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 12, 1785, p. 3.
- <sup>87</sup> "Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Evening Herald*, Oct. 4, 1786. p. 83; see also the *The Independent Gazetteer*. Oct. 16, 1782. p. 3; *The Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 4, 1785. pp. 2, 3. The attribution of the name to the republican faction is made by Brunhouse, *Counter-revolution*, p. 282.
- <sup>88</sup> *An Address to the Freemen of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia, 1788 (Broadside, 20915).
- <sup>89</sup> Hambden. *To the Freemen of the City of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia, Oct. 9, 1792. (Broadside, Evans 46585).
- <sup>90</sup> "From the Aurora," *Gazette of the U.S.*, Oct. 2, 1796, p. 3.
- <sup>91</sup> "Philadelphia," *Porcupine's Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1798; see Marshall Smelser, "The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," *The Review of Politics*, 13(4) 1951, pp. 457-482, for a discussion of the role that France played in Federalist attacks on their opponents.
- <sup>92</sup> "Extract of a letter from Hartford, Maryland," *Porcupine's Gazette*, Oct. 8, 1798, p. 3.
- <sup>93</sup> "From the American Gazette," *Aurora*, Aug. 26, 1796, p. 3.
- <sup>94</sup> "From a Correspondent," *Aurora*, Oct. 19, 1796, p. 3.
- <sup>95</sup> "Philadelphia," *The Aurora*, Oct. 15, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>96</sup> "Philadelphia," *Aurora*, Oct. 16, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>97</sup> "Philadelphia," *Aurora*, Oct. 24, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>98</sup> "Election at Baltimore," *Porcupine's Gazette*, Oct. 8, 1795, p. 3.
- <sup>99</sup> *The Philadelphia Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1800, p. 3
- <sup>100</sup> ICONOCLASTES, *Aurora*, Aug. 1, 1796, p. 2.
- <sup>101</sup> John Beckley to General Irvine, March 12, 1796, *Society Miscellaneous Collection*, HSP.
- <sup>102</sup> John Beckley to Gen. Irvine, Sept. 15, 1796, *Irvine Papers*, vol. 13, HSP, p. 112. Cited in Fay, "Early party machinery," p. 384; Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., "John Beckley: An Early American Party Manager," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 13.1 (1956) p. 47.
- <sup>103</sup> FOLIO, *Aurora*, Oct. 7, 1796, p. 3
- <sup>104</sup> NO TORY, *Aurora*, Oct. 11, 1796, pp. 2, 3.
- <sup>105</sup> "An Election Anecdote," *Aurora*, Oct. 11, p. 3.
- <sup>106</sup> "From a Correspondent," *Aurora*, Oct. 18, 1796, p. 3
- <sup>107</sup> *Aurora*, Oct. 13, 1796, p.3.
- <sup>108</sup> Extract of a letter from Thomas Paine, *Aurora*, Oct. 17, p. 3.
- <sup>109</sup> See the articles of PHOCION in *Gazette of the U.S.*, Oct. 14, p. 2, and Oct. 15, p. 2, for attacks on Jefferson's philosophy and his argument about the natural inferiority of blacks.
- <sup>110</sup> Fay, "Early Party Machinery," *PMH&B*, p. 385; Philip M. Marsh, "John Beckley: Mystery Man of the Early Jeffersonians," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 72(1) 1948 pp. 54-69;



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Cunningham, "John Beckley: An Early American Party Manager," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 13(1) 1956, pp. 57-50.

<sup>111</sup> FRANKLIN, *Aurora*, Oct. 25, 1796, p. 2

<sup>112</sup> *To the Freemen of Pennsylvania*, cited in Fay, "Early party machinery," pp. 388-390. Fenno reprinted the bill in *Gazette of the U.S.*, Nov. 1, 1796, pp. 2,3, in order to demonstrate the perfidy of the Republican side.

<sup>113</sup> BAIT FOR GUDGEONS, *Gazette of the U.S.*, Oct. 31, 1796, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Aurora*, Oct. 31, 1796, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> William Smith to Ralph Izard, Nov. 3, 1796. "Federalist Correspondence: 1789-1797," *American Historical Review*, 14(4) July, 1909, pp. 782.

<sup>116</sup> Coates' letter to W. Moyer, Jr., November 4, 1796, *Samuel Coates Letter Book, Sept. 1797-May, 1802*, pp.142-43. Roynell Collection, Case 17, sect. A. HSP. Source cited in Baumann, *The Democratic-Republicans*, p. 566.

<sup>117</sup> Lewis, Rawle letter, and Ingersoll comment, in *Gazette of the U.S.*, Nov. 4, 1796, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Coates-Moyer letter, p. 143.

<sup>119</sup> "Philadelphia, Thursday, November 8." *General Advertiser*, Nov. 8, 1792, p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Extracts from the Journal of Elizabeth Drinker* (np, 1889) p. 293. It is worth pointing out that Drinker, although interested in politics, seems not to have noted many other earlier Election Days.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in Silbey, *The American political nation*, Table 1.2, p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> This estimate is drawn from the data in Baumann, *The Democratic-Republicans*, Appendix II, Tables 4a, 5a, and Appendix III, Tables 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a.

<sup>123</sup> Smith to Ralph Izard, Nov. 8, 1796. "Federalist Correspondence," pp. 784-85. Noted in Baumann, *Democratic-Republicans*, p. 566.

<sup>124</sup> *Gazette of the U.S.*, Nov. 8, 1796, p. 2. Bache quickly dismissed Fenno's interpretation of the scene—"let the people decide whether the author of the above paragraph is most a fool or a beast"—but did not dispute the facts. *Aurora*, Nov. 11, 1796, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> Smith-Izard letter, Nov. 8, 1796, "Federalist Correspondence." pp. 785.

<sup>126</sup> Chauncey Goodrich to Oliver Wolcott, Sr., Nov. 15, 1796. *Memoirs of the Federal Administration*, vol. 1, ed. George Gibbs (New York: np, 1846), p. 394.

<sup>127</sup> "Extract of another letter from Philadelphia," *State Gazette of North Carolina*, Nov. 24, 1796, p. 4. Source cited in Baumann, *Democratic-Republicans*, p. 570, note 138.

<sup>128</sup> William Bingham to Rufus King, Nov. 29, 1796. *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, ed. Charles King (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), p. 113. Source cited in Baumann, *Democratic-Republicans*, p. 568.

<sup>129</sup> Oliver Wolcott to Oliver Wolcott, Sr., Nov. 19, 1796. *Memoirs of the Federal Administration*, p. 396. Also Wolcott to Wolcott, Sr., Nov. 27, 1796, *ibid.*, p. 401; Fisher Ames to Oliver Wolcott, Nov. 14, 1796, *ibid.*, p. 293. Source cited in Baumann, *Democratic Republicans*, p. 568.

<sup>130</sup> Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania: 1790-1801*, p. 171.

<sup>131</sup> See *Aurora*, Nov. 19, 1796, p. 3, for a letter from Thomas McKean and other members of the Republican ticket, urging the governor to wait. *Aurora*, Nov. 21, 1796, p. 2: a reply from Dallas to McKean and co., saying the governor has decided to postpone calling the election. A defense of the governor in the *Aurora*, Nov. 30, 1796, outlines both the Federalist case against Mifflin and the Republican's reply. Republican charges against federalist postmasters are to be found in *Aurora*, Nov. 29, 1796, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Mifflin's announcement of the returns can be found in *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fourth Series, vol. 4, ed. G. E. Reed, (Harrisburg: State of PA, 1900) pp. 356-58.

<sup>133</sup> *Aurora*, Sept. 13, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Campaigns* (Oxford: New York, 1984) p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 9, 1799, p. 3.

<sup>136</sup> *General Advertiser*, Oct. 11, 1794, p. 3.

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<sup>137</sup> See the record of the meeting at Dunwoody's tavern, and the slate of electors noted at the bottom of a series of "declarations" of the citizens there assembled, in *Gazette of the U.S.*, Oct. 22, 1796, p. 3; likewise, a similar report from the Republican side in *Aurora*, Sept. 28, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> See the poem published in *Gazette of the U.S.*, Sept. 23, 1796, p.2.

<sup>139</sup> *Aurora*, Oct. 10, 1800, p. 2.

## **Chapter Five: Philadelphia's antebellum Election Day**

This chapter will treat Election Day in Philadelphia from the period of the early 1800s to 1860. During this time, three elements critical to the Election Day performance underwent evolutions, which were both influenced by, and influenced, that event. First, at the national level, political parties began to assume a greater degree of legitimacy than they held at the turn of the nineteenth century. Related to this, they also began to develop a far more complex set of institutional practices—ward committees, a system of party officials, nominating conventions, mass media networks—that served to integrate local groups of voters and citizens into a national system of partisan politics.<sup>1</sup>

Second, in Philadelphia itself, the dramatic increase the city's population resulted in, among other things, a shift in the way that Philadelphians from different classes, religions, and races reacted to one another. One historian of this period has called this the "Turbulent Era" in American city life, and Philadelphia produced some of the most severe examples of both inter-racial and inter-religious violence.<sup>2</sup> That atmosphere of distrust and aggression meant that the exercise of violence, or at least the threat thereof, was often an element in the Election Day performance.

Finally, there was a change in the mass media. Newspapers were no longer merely sympathetic to one party or another, but often had institutional links to different political parties (as seen in titles like *The Democratic Press*).<sup>3</sup> During the campaign period and on Election Day, they were explicit tools for party organization and mobilization. In other words, many of Philadelphia's journalists no longer

addressed themselves to “the public,” but to that specific portion of the public affiliated with their party.<sup>4</sup> Party insiders, including the newspaper editors who provided the heated partisan rhetoric designed to stir the complacent voter, were given an added personal incentive by the growth of political patronage. For the good party man, political victory meant something other than the advancement of the common weal. It meant the prospect of a contract, or a good government job.<sup>5</sup> The exceptions here were papers in the new, penny press mold, like the *Public Ledger*, or a journal like the *Evening Bulletin*, which defined itself through a new technology, rather than party loyalty. Although these papers had their own political sympathies, they tended, especially in the case of the *Public Ledger*, to wage an ongoing war against party, and against the often violent, irrational, and corrupt Election Days which, they felt, party competition produced.

These changes gave the antebellum Election Day in Philadelphia a style that distinguished it both from what had come before and what would come after, providing celebrants with a set of vivid symbols and practices to make sense of the political identity they were enacting.<sup>6</sup> More elaborate and involved than the Federalist Election Day, with a developing set of traditional practices, it was also a more informal event, more open to improvisations on the part of the performers, than the Election Day of the Gilded Age. A number of the distinctive practices and symbols of the antebellum Election Day were the direct or indirect result of the party’s increased role in the political culture. Among other things, this meant that debate over Election Day, and criticisms over its practice, were at the same time reflections on the growing

importance of party in the political culture. The role of party also meant that groups who found themselves irrelevant to the party battle—for the purposes of this chapter I focus on Philadelphia's black residents—found themselves, in the end, excluded from the performance.

#### Political and social context: setting the stage

Sanford Higginbotham has argued that the decline of Federalist conservatism happened earlier, and even more dramatically, in Pennsylvania than in most other states.<sup>7</sup> The 1799 gubernatorial election of Thomas McKean marked the beginning of Republican dominance in the state, and in the early 1800s, Pennsylvania was known as the “key stone in the democratic arch,” because of its unwavering support, on the national level, of Republican candidates. Until the realignment that occurred with the presidential campaigns of Andrew Jackson, the state never wavered in this support, and all of its Governors during that period were associated with the Republican Party.<sup>8</sup>

That does not mean that the city of Philadelphia lacked partisan conflict in its elections. Due to its relatively large commercial middle class, the city was one of the few locations in the state where Federalists could still count on some support at the polls;<sup>9</sup> until the late 1810s, when realignment and the evident hopelessness of the Federalist cause scattered the party, there seems to have been a constant Federalist presence on Philadelphia's Election grounds.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, by McKean's second administration, Republicans in the state had begun to argue amongst themselves, so

that during elections, Republicans often spent as much time attacking opponents within their own party as they did the Federalists.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the unique nature of Pennsylvania politics—the near hegemony of the Republicans combined with their constant factional infighting—the state was somewhat later than most, as Richard McCormick has noted, in composing its politics along the lines of the Whig-Democracy division that began to take hold in the 1830s, although it eventually did so.<sup>12</sup> Like many other Northern states in this period, the party system also managed to accommodate several significant minor parties. In the case of Pennsylvania, these included the Anti-masons, the Native American Party, and the Know Nothings.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time that this political evolution was taking place, the city of Philadelphia was also undergoing a great deal of other changes in terms of demographics and its economy. A fairly dramatic increase in population radically changed the social make-up of the city.<sup>14</sup> Philadelphia's black community, for example, was the largest of any northern city during the latter part of this era, and it was consequently considered the center of urban black cultural life in the North.<sup>15</sup> Immigrants, both internal and foreign, continued to come to the city to find work.<sup>16</sup> At the same time that these demographic shifts were going on, Philadelphia's economy moved from a dependence on trade and commerce to manufacturing.<sup>17</sup>

These changes had important implications for the city's public life. The dramatic increase in large numbers of poor residents who differed along religious, racial, cultural and class lines from the native population increased the potential for

social conflict, especially since many of the new groups were forced to live side by side with one another in some of city's worst areas.<sup>18</sup> Ethnic grievances were in turn often grafted onto class ones, as the new economy brought great wealth to a few citizens and barely sustainable livelihoods to a great many more; by the end of the 1820s, Philadelphia was home to a short-lived working class party, the Workingman's Party, which had its own newspaper and ran its own candidates in elections.<sup>19</sup> In 1828, the paper dismissed the major factions as irrelevant to the city's mechanics and other men who worked with their hands. "What are now Democracy and Federalism but names?" it asked its readers.<sup>20</sup> Philadelphia's city's working class, the editors wrote, "know and feel that we have an interest of our own to maintain, and we will no longer bow the knee to a political dagon who has no eye to our wants."<sup>21</sup>

Although the Workingman's party was not long for this world, the social cleavages wrought by the new urban life, both economic and cultural, survived and even thrived in the new political culture. It is not surprising that social resentments would have spilled over into party politics. The strong relationship between cultural identity and political activity in American politics of this period has been made by, among others, Lee Benson, Richard Jensen, Joel H. Silbey, and Ronald Formisano.<sup>22</sup> However, as these writers have also pointed out, the link between ethnic and political conflict should not be simplified. Different social divisions might be more relevant than others, depending on the context.<sup>23</sup> Jensen's argument dividing moderns and anti-moderns also makes a clear distinction between ethno-cultural difference and policy agendas problematic. To take one example: urban Catholics did not support the

Democratic party simply out of cultural or religious loyalty, but because of its general political philosophy of limited government. These groups were suspicious of government activism in a country still largely Protestant.<sup>24</sup>

D.I. Greenstein has made a slightly different argument, in relation to Philadelphia specifically, that goes even closer to my subject and my point. Greenstein notes that simple “ecological” changes in the city cannot explain the dynamics of ethnic, racial, and class battles that were being fought out at the time.<sup>25</sup> An “industrial working class,” he points out, is not made overnight. As for the role of Irish Catholics and Blacks in provoking resentment among the rest of the city’s population, he notes that in both cases, the extent of the violent resentment occasioned by their presences seems all out of proportion to their actual numbers.<sup>26</sup> The rise of a class consciousness among the city’s mechanics, the increased resentment toward Catholic immigrants, the growth of racist attacks in the 1830s and 40s—all of these phenomena were cultivated, if not created, for political purposes: the founders of the Workingman’s Party were actually middle-class businessmen, on the outs of another political group (the Liberty Party), and racial and ethnic resentments in the city were stoked, by Democrats and Whigs, respectively, in order to create a solid base of support.<sup>27</sup> “The argument,” Greenstein adds, “is not that the urban political (sic) was a motive force in the development of an industrial or capitalist urban form, but that it shaped the experience of such developments, and perhaps even hindered or accelerated their advance in particular cities.”<sup>28</sup>



The argument that I wish to make about Election Day in this period is somewhat similar: that the day gave Philadelphians a cultural form through which to express various sets of grievances and cultural prejudices. This very public contest over political power landed in the midst of a community in which various sorts of social struggles were already being carried out. The political contestants needed a way to mobilize voters, and calling upon class and racial biases was useful in getting bodies to the polls. Hence, the performance of Election Day often became an exercise in the display of social difference and a battle for social power, at the voting booth and beyond it.

#### Party and Election Day: the script

It was parties who wrote the script for the day: parties who produced the tickets and distributed them, parties who cajoled the voters to get out and support the vote, parties who provided an organization and a set of symbols by which the private citizen could connect himself to a national political community. Various means were used to do this—public meetings, parades, rallies—but an increasingly important tool was the mass media.<sup>29</sup> With the growing sophistication and elaboration of the party's role, the use of the party journal to link various members of the partisan public together and to inform them of the party's intents and activities became indispensable.<sup>30</sup> The paper served as a primary method of publicizing the party ticket, of providing readers to the times and places of ward meetings, of announcing the

results of those meetings, and of informing readers where and when to find tickets on the day of the vote.<sup>31</sup>

The party's preparation for Election Day began well in advance of the campaign. Before anything else, a ticket needed to be set. In this early 1800s, this was often accomplished through the use of a caucus meeting, made up either of party notables, or the party members who sat in the state or national legislature. Once the caucus decided on a slate, partisans would hold "public" meetings in the city itself to declare their support for the ticket and plan for the Election Day.<sup>32</sup> This system lasted through most of the 1810s, but attacks on "King Caucus" as an un-democratic form and contrary to the spirit of the revolution became more strident late in that decade and in the early 1820s, and by the 1824 Presidential Election, the caucus system was essentially finished as a method for choosing a Presidential or indeed any other sort of candidate.<sup>33</sup> In its place, parties turned to a more elaborate system of nominating meetings. Ward meetings would lead to city or county meetings, leading into state conventions, and, in turn, for national office, to the national convention. This allowed, at least in theory, for more popular input into the nomination process than the caucus system, but at the same time gave the party a way to channel that input into acceptable candidates.<sup>34</sup>

Nomination styles were reflected in the content of newspapers. During the age of the caucus system, Philadelphia's partisan papers just prior to Election Day were full of the reports of meetings from various committees throughout the city. In ideology at least, these meetings were not instruments of party but of patriots, and

their rhetoric was republican. Members did not dictate a ticket but suggested or encouraged a set of candidates. Good and loyal citizens had met to discuss the upcoming election at a public meeting, had come to a decision on a slate, and thought it only right and proper to recommend it to their compatriots.

FELLOW CITIZENS—A great election is near at hand. We have all much at stake in its issue. Shall we not then commune together. Shall we not hear the arguments that are offered, examine the facts and inquire into the qualifications and principles of the candidates who are presented for our suffrages.<sup>35</sup>

Reports of these meetings contained a great deal more than tickets. Secretaries of the meeting often also wrote up a statement from the meeting, concerning the members' support of party principles and current policies, and perhaps their positive opinions of the general good character of the men on the ticket. They listed the names of those men responsible for keeping watch on the opposition at the polls, and those whose responsibility was to gather up voters from their neighborhood: committees of surveillance and superintendence.<sup>36</sup>

The development of the convention system, and the growing acceptance of party, meant that such meetings grew increasingly unnecessary for the purposes of publicizing the vote.<sup>37</sup> The nominating system itself, trickling up from the ward level to the national convention, served as the justification for the party's claim that the candidate was the people's own. It was a result of the people's choice, made not through the ratification of the local citizenry but through the machinery of the party, which channeled the people's voices through various levels of the nomination process. Newspapers in the city increasingly presented the party's ticket as a *fait accompli*.<sup>38</sup>

By 1836, some Philadelphia newspapers had begun to carry the name of the candidate at the top of their first inside page, months before the campaign even started, to which, in time, the state ticket would be added.<sup>39</sup> The presidential candidate thus became the party's champion, its standard bearer. To fill this role, and again following the tradition set down by Jackson, parties tried to convince ex-military men to serve as their candidates. Figures like Zachary Taylor were the most prominent and recognizable national celebrities of the era, and their selfless role in the defense of the nation gave them an image of republican disinterest, standing above factional claims.<sup>40</sup>

The climax of the party's organizational efforts came on the day of the vote. Ward leaders needed to arrange for the distribution of printed tickets on the campaign grounds, for the transportation of old or infirm voters, and for committees of surveillance to travel throughout neighborhoods, knocking on doors, making certain that dependable supporters had made it to the polls.<sup>41</sup> The paper was a useful tool in enlisting the general readership to support the effort, and in instructing them on what to do once they got to the State House. On the day of the election, and perhaps for the several days leading up to that point, the most important organizational role of the party journal was to mobilize the voting public. "YE PIOUS, PRUDENT, AND DISPASSIONATE CITIZENS OF PHILADELPHIA," read one Election Day call to arms, "NOW TURN OUT AND SAVE YOUR COUNTRY."<sup>42</sup> Another declared:

THIS DAY DETERMINES  
Whether the Union and the State shall regard the Democrats of  
Philadelphia as men of Principle or Factionists!  
In Union, there is Character!  
In Union, there is safety!  
In Union, there is Victory!

**Be ye therefore United!**

**THE VALUE OF A VOTE.** He who does not vote the whole ticket abridges himself in the exercise of his most sacred right, his most precious inheritance...Be you sure to vote and to remind your neighbor of his duty. This you own to your ancestors and to your posterity—you owe it to yourself and your county.<sup>43</sup>

Partisans could also be alerted to the presence of a rogue party slate that would appear on the Election grounds along with the regular slate, the manner of telling the difference between the two (ie., the name of the candidate causing the division between party leaders), and the importance of voting the regular slate: all, perhaps, framed in terms of a “plot” on the part of opposition schemers and factionalists to trick the loyal voter.<sup>44</sup>

A partisan’s duty was first to vote, second to get his neighbors to the polls. “If there is a doubtful man in the block or district, the work is not quite done,” the *U.S. Gazette* lectured to Philadelphia’s Whigs in 1840.<sup>45</sup> “Are each and all of you busy?” the *North American* asked four years later. “Have you warmed your lukewarm neighbor?—have you reasoned with him who is doubting?”<sup>46</sup> And there were other claims on the partisan. “[S]hould any attempt be made to *crowd out* the aged and infirm, we trust that those who have more muscle and nerve will take legal measures to correct so wicked and cowardly an abuse.”<sup>47</sup>

Often, the Election Day call to arms would be pitched as a series of binary oppositions between the preferred candidate and his major opponent. For example, on the eve of the 1812 Presidential vote, the *Commercial and Political Register* presented readers with a number of options. Those who wanted an end to a disastrous war, a

healthy economy, a democratic political system, could vote for DeWitt Clinton and the “Peace” ticket. Those who wanted the opposite—war, economic disaster, political tyranny—could support James Madison and the “War” ticket.<sup>48</sup> In a similar manner, on the day of the 1817 vote for governor, the *Democratic Press* compared the two candidates, William Findlay and Joseph Hiester, based on various criteria, such as manner of nomination, firmness of character, talent, political principles, and deportment in public life. In every category the paper’s choice, Findlay, demonstrated his clear superiority over the corrupt and aristocratic Hiester.<sup>49</sup>

The logic of the Election Day mobilization process encouraged this method of dividing the voting public into the rhetoric of those for and against the party. That process in turn promoted a style of rhetoric in which the opposition was presented as not simply mistaken, but morally reprehensible. On the day of the 1832 General Election in the city, the pro-Democracy *Pennsylvanian* advised its readers to watch the Whig voters “doing their master’s bidding at the polls. You can recognize them by the total want of manliness in their bearing, by that abject character of countenance that marks the willing slave.”<sup>50</sup> In 1812, the *Gazette* called on loyal Federalists to brave the drums and banners and fisticuffs of the Democratic Cordwainers and the accusations of tory, from the “foreign born.”<sup>51</sup> *The North American*, a supporter of both the Whig and Nativist causes in the 1844 election, was especially pleased to point out any kind of perfidy, real or imagined, committed by Irish Catholics. A Polk banner flown outside a Boston Catholic church was evidence of the “foreign alliances” of locofocism.<sup>52</sup> “Sectarianism at the Polls!” screamed an editorial several days later,

“Foreign fanaticism against American virtue.”<sup>53</sup> The day of the vote, the paper mentioned that an Irishman—unspecified as to time and place—had been seen cutting down an American flag.<sup>54</sup>

Immigrant Irish were a favorite target of Federalist and anti-Democracy sheets. The other side preferred to attack the “aristocracy,” and “tories.” *The Democratic Press*, the day before the 1812 election, presented an imaginary burlesque of a family of wealthy Quakers strutting to the polls, the father, “swelling with spiritual pride and high mindedness,” his belly hanging over as if “fed with fat things,” followed by a son brandishing an “ELECTION DAGGER, and “a band of Brawlers for prostituted rights, and Quibblers upon counsel.” This baroque company was concluded by yet another Quaker hypocrite, “silver teapot on his head, lips labeled, “By God!!! If any man attempts to hinder me from voting I’ll shoot him dead.”<sup>55</sup> On the day of the 1836 Presidential vote, the *American Sentinel* addressed itself particularly to “Young men,” and “Democrats! Who have not the fortune to be rich.”<sup>56</sup> Class was not the only tool the Democratic papers used, however. In the election of 1844, the *Pennsylvanian* occasionally referred to the Whigs as “coons,” presumably in order to play up that party’s supposed sympathy for abolitionism.<sup>57</sup>

Any deaths that could be charged to the opposition were useful. On the day of the 1812 General Election, *Relf’s Philadelphia Gazette* published a “memoriam” in honor of revolutionary war veteran James Lingan, a victim of Republican mob violence during the Baltimore newspaper riots earlier that year.<sup>58</sup> The day before the 1848 vote, *The North American* used the death of a young man in a Whig parade the

weekend before to rally the troops, comparing the Loco Focos to the bloody revolutionaries then at work in Europe.<sup>59</sup> The next day, the paper reported on another outrage committed on honest Whigs by Democratic supporters, announced to readers that the “Red Republic” was imminent, and declared that a “reign of terror” had commenced in the city. It ended by calling upon good Whig voters to keep their peace at the polls.<sup>60</sup>

Continuing a tradition that dated back to the colonial period, newspapers also used “discoveries” of opposition efforts at Election Day “tricks” to both demonize opponents and fire up supporters. Such tricks were of three general sorts. First, there was the spreading of malicious tickets, ie., tickets promoted or even identified as Whig, but containing largely Democratic names, or vice versa.<sup>61</sup> Second, there were frauds associated with illegal voting—“colonization,” or the importing of voters from other cities, “personation,” in which a voter might vote twice by using another’s name, or illegal voting by un-naturalized citizens.<sup>62</sup> In a particularly ingenious example, the *U.S. Gazette* managed to cram a number of accusations into a single passage. “We leave these matters of collateral enormity, and many others, and put this plain question, Whether a man who is created a freeman for temporary purposes, can be cut into three or four parts like a polypus, and every part preserve its vitality, and exercise all the rights of a free citizen?”<sup>63</sup> The final sorts of accusations were about corruption in the counting or taking of the vote itself. Noting that far more Federalist voters had showed up for a ward election for Inspectors than were actually counted, the *Gazette* remarked, “How this is to be accounted we know not, but we do know that as soon as



the poll was closed, the window was shut and no person except the constable, the judges, and their clerks, was admitted to be present.”<sup>64</sup> In each case, the known moral corruption of the opposition required diligence and due care among loyal Americans at the election grounds on the day of the vote.

As a set of institutional practices, the political party was indispensable for creating what Election Day in Philadelphia became during this period. It provided voters with a set of symbols and practices by which he could enact his political identity on Election Day and relate the abstractions of nation and ideology to own life. Despite their essential role in promoting the Election Day ritual and determining its meaning as a national event, however, parties continued to come under attack in popular rhetoric. Federal and Republican papers alike in the pre-Jacksonian era decried “factionalists” and the “malignity of party spirit.” Election propaganda in the city generally refused to dignify opponents with the label they themselves used. In discussions of the opposition and in the printed results of the vote, mainstream Republicans became known as “violents,” or the “War” party (in the 1812 election), or the “Democratick” party, or the “caucus” party.<sup>65</sup> Republicans responded by using names like “tories,” “Hartford Conventionalists,” and “Blue Light men” for the Federalists.<sup>66</sup> In their own, intra-party battles, they threw around terms like “Patent Democrats,” “Quids,” “Democrats of the Revolution,” “Old School democrats,” and “Independent Republicans,” to distinguish friend from foe.<sup>67</sup> Although the use of such epithets declined as the century wore on, Whig newspapers like the *U.S. Gazette* or the

*North American* continued to refer to Democrats in their returns as “Loco Focos,” and the Democratic program as “locofocism,” throughout the 1840s.<sup>68</sup>

Party was distrusted in the Philadelphia papers of the nineteenth century for much the same reasons as it had been in the eighteenth: it promoted irrational passions and unthinking devotion among the voter, it often presented violent and immoderate policies, and it rewarded the selfish pursuits of the professional politician and office seeker.<sup>69</sup> As a rhetorical tool, party continued to serve as a useful method of attack on those one disagreed with. That these attacks were generally made for partisan purposes only adds another twist to the paradox of the party’s role in Election Day.

#### The style of the antebellum Election Day: the performance

John Lewis Krimmel’s 1815 painting of Election Day in Philadelphia is a portrayal of a civic festival or public holiday. Almost everything in the frame suggests activity and color: a few happy, drunken souls sitting on Chestnut Street’s cobblestones; boys racing a hoop; large crowds of men—some well-dressed, some not, some serious, some not—scattered throughout; fist fights on the steps of a bar; carriages depositing ancient voters from their cabs; street vendors hawking their wares; party workers accosting a voter with their tickets; flags flying out of windows; a large, wooden, tub-like vehicle, carrying men and an American flag, being hauled past the State House; and in the background, a mass of bodies thronged around the polling windows, pushing and shoving, a few voters thrown to the ground.<sup>70</sup>

Krimmel's painting captures the mood of excitement and frenzied movement that comes through as well in contemporary and historical accounts of Philadelphia's antebellum Election Day.<sup>71</sup> Election Day was a moment when the city was kept in a "continual uproar," from the moment the polls opened until they were counted.<sup>72</sup> Isaac Mickle, a resident of nearby Cambden, noted on the eve of the 1840 election that even "women and young children partake of the general feeling."<sup>73</sup> The color of the day managed to provoke a grudging admiration from even Sidney George Fisher, no friend of nineteenth American politics as generally practiced, or of the loutish democratic mob that practiced it, on an Election Day in which he served as Inspector:

The two large rooms of the State House, with the officers of the wards at the windows, receiving votes & discussing claims of the applicants, the shouts & hurrahs of the crowd outside, and the variety of character & demeanor of those in the house, gave the affair enough of excitement to me, who had never witnessed anything of the kind, to compensate for the labor, confinement and the vulgarity of my associates. It was a new page of life opened, and to see the mode in which the great main spring of democratic government is managed was worth the trouble that I had.<sup>74</sup>

Commentaries on the election almost never failed to mention to the flags that hung from the windows of party headquarters, offices, and private homes.<sup>75</sup> (One report estimated 5,000 flags flying in the city on the day of the 1844 General Election.<sup>76</sup>) Most decorative were the headquarters, often located in bars like Carel's Bolivar House, home of the Jacksonian Whigs, and the Democrat's stronghold at Amos Holahan's Bar.<sup>77</sup> Holahan's, advantageously located near the State House, even used the day of the election as the moment to "tap" the first beer of the season.<sup>78</sup> Besides the flags and the bunting, the headquarters often featured huge transparencies of

American symbols or the images of the party's candidate. In 1828, the *American Sentinel* claimed the Jackson transparency in front of Holahan's was 50 feet high.<sup>79</sup> Placards abounded on the street corners leading up to the State House, or sometimes carried aloft by partisans, publicizing the party slate, or urging supporters to get to the polls, or helpfully informing voters of a scandal or charge of corruption recently leveled at some member of the opposition. Cabs and omnibuses moved back and forth through Chestnut Street all day long, ferrying the sick and infirm to the polls. Not everyone would get home directly after voting; there was a great deal to discuss. Rumor abounded. On the day of the 1840 Presidential Election, a man walked about the election grounds with a sign declaring that a city policeman had been arrested for illegal voting.<sup>80</sup> In 1808, a letter arrived in the city falsely stating that one of the gubernatorial candidates had been murdered by desperadoes.<sup>81</sup> Street vendors sold oyster stew, cheese, and roasted chestnuts to waiting voters and observers.<sup>82</sup>

Part of the lively atmosphere was due to the city's decision to continue holding its poll at a single spot—the old State House on Chestnut Street. Until the legislature moved the polls to voting districts in 1851, almost every voter in the city needed to troop down to the State House to cast his vote at one of the several ward windows.<sup>83</sup> After a hotly contested campaign, thousands of voters might be waiting on the Election grounds by the time the State House bell began to ring at nine o'clock, announcing the opening of the polls (the bell would continue to ring, at five minute intervals, throughout the day, until the voting was over, a function it continued to perform even after the State House had ceased to serve as a polling place).<sup>84</sup> Voters

would vote by giving their several ballots—Pennsylvania still required a separate ballot for each office—to the ticket Inspectors behind the windows, who would then place them in the ballot boxes. A clerk would check off the voter's name on the list of registered voters, so that he could not vote again.<sup>85</sup>

Voting was not an easy or comfortable business in antebellum Philadelphia. A window could generally process only about 90 voters an hour, which, combined with the large numbers at the polls, meant that men would sometimes have to wait four or five hours to cast their vote.<sup>86</sup> Patience was not the only virtue required—physical strength, determination, and a certain amount of courage came in helpful. Oftentimes, a crowd of men would surround a polling window, sometimes linked to the “committees of vigilance.” Their purpose was ostensibly to keep watch on illegal or multiple voters, but in the event, they often simply tried to block access to the polls of men who they either suspected or knew to be members of the opposition party.<sup>87</sup> In the history of nineteenth century Philadelphia writer Thomas Westcott, the working class ward of North Mulberry was particularly notorious for this sort of behavior. Attempts to fool the gatekeepers of the vote were not taken gracefully, according to Westcott. A man who tried to sneak by an opposition vote might get his hat mashed over his eyes, then find himself hustled, pulled, kicked, or even thrown to the ground.<sup>88</sup> Another way to keep opposition votes from getting into the polling booth was through the use of tax receipts or naturalization papers. If an Inspector was suspicious of a voter's citizenship, or if the voter was not on the list of taxables, he could require papers documenting his residency or naturalization, or a tax receipt from the previous year.<sup>89</sup>

If the voter did not have the papers, a public oath as to payment of taxes, or the personal testimony from a legal voter as to his neighbor's citizenship, could suffice.<sup>90</sup>

Because the law allowed the Inspector such leeway in the methods of allowing dubious voters the right to cast a ballot, the votes for the Inspectors, taken the weekend before the vote itself, were considered extremely important. "I was astonished to witness the anxiety felt by leading men, that *their* party should elect *inspectors*. The eventual choice at the general election seemed, in fact, in their estimation, actually to rest upon the having "Inspectors" of their party," wrote Englishmen Henry Fearon of his visit to Philadelphia's election in 1817. Fearon naively suggested that it could be of no consequence of what party the Inspectors were, as they were protected from partiality by the secret ballot. The response was that, on the contrary, "the fact of the inspectors being on one side or the other had been calculated to make a difference of upwards of 200 votes in a particular election!—arising from the reception of improper, and the rejection of good votes. The means by which an inspector can effect this, are said to be remarkably exact."<sup>91</sup>

Presumably one means of determining the vote was through the voter himself. A known partisan of either side could be counted upon to support or oppose one's preferred ticket, and treated accordingly. Moreover, since the relationship between ethnicity and class was so strongly assumed in this culture, the style of a man's dress or his accent might also be enough to put an Inspector on guard. Ballots offered another way of determining a vote. During one election, a Federalist paper charged, Democrats had underlined the names of every member on their printed ticket with

dark lines. Since the line's showed through the white ballot paper, Democratic Inspectors were able to see whether a voter had cast his vote for their side or not, and could easily dispose of an opposition ballot before they placed it in the box.<sup>92</sup> Several decades later, The Democratic *Pennsylvanian* charged Whigs with placing at the head of their Presidential Electors tickets a large and elaborate, heavily italicized, font. The editors of the *Pennsylvanian* did not object to a title at the head of the ticket—a man had to know what party he was voting, after all—but they charged that the purpose of the elaborate font was, again, to show through the ballot paper and alert other voters and Inspectors as to the voter's choice. "It is perfectly evident that the "marked tickets" of Friday defeated one of the main objects of the existing laws of this commonwealth."<sup>93</sup> The response of the Whig *U.S. Gazette* was that "Every man has a right to vote, or print his vote, in what text he choses." The *Gazette* editors then added a counter charge for good measure, namely, that some Democrats on the election grounds had tried to trick voters by placing the Whig font at the head of their Democratic tickets.<sup>94</sup>

Given the atmosphere surrounding the casting of the vote, it is not surprising that reports of fisticuffs and brawls at polling windows and on the election grounds were common.<sup>95</sup> The day of Presidential Election of 1840, coming at the end of the Harrison's famous Log Cabin and Cider campaign, seems, on the basis of press reports, to have been one large riot from late morning to early evening. In Southwark, a Democratic poll inspector on the run from an angry Whig mob found refuge into a nearby building and was forced to lock himself in a cellar until another gang, this one

Democratic, arrived to help him out. A battle ensued; *The Pennsylvanian* claimed that the Democrats routed the opposition and that one miserable Whig was later found quivering under a bed in a nearby building.<sup>96</sup> Many residents blamed Election Day fights on the fact of a single poll, which brought together men of various classes, ethnicities, religions, and political persuasions at a time of much heated passion. “Much has been said of late, and with great justice too, of the inconveniences and dangers of having masses of people collated about the polls of the time of a warm and exciting contest.”<sup>97</sup>

Even without fights at the polls, a Philadelphia Election often had something of a martial air. Political conflicts were often taken to be milder versions of the one between the Americans and the British 30 years earlier, so that what happened at the polls was essentially a peaceful revolution on a yearly basis, the people’s re-enactment of the founding the nation. Prior to the General Election of 1820, *The Aurora* lauded the suffrage as a remedy and antidote to actual war.<sup>98</sup> In 1824, it bemoaned the lack of success of its presidential candidate, Henry Clay. Clay’s defeat, the paper argued, had been due to the fact that the crypto-Federalists supporting John Quincy Adams were “well-drilled.” Election Day required a party presence—committees of vigilance, “recruiting sergeants” at the polls—in a word, *discipline*.<sup>99</sup> In the early part of the century, when membership in militias was still popular, voters might even see groups like the Democratic Cordwainers or the Republican Blacksmiths marching on the election grounds.<sup>100</sup> In 1812, John Binns was accused of leading a group of militiamen—under colors, drums, and a pipe—directly up to the poll. A furious report



on the event by the *U.S. Gazette* noted that when challenged by the mayor to act peaceably, the group threatened to beat him, then essentially held him captive for the next few hours.<sup>101</sup> The state militia had also marched on the day, the paper noted, in express contravention of Pennsylvania law.<sup>102</sup> Although the marching of the militias seems to have disappeared by the 1830s, Isaac Mickle was still complaining of hot-headed voters parading about with drum and fife on the 1840 Election Day, and a Whig reporter mocked a group of young boys who paraded past voters the same year with drums and music, carrying Van Buren and Jackson transparencies and a United States flag.<sup>103</sup>

Betting and drinking also contributed to the day's atmosphere. The two often went together, as Fearon noted on a tour of the numerous bars surrounding the State House on Election Day, 1817.<sup>104</sup> Plying the voters with liquor was a time-honored practice at this point and often cheerfully carried out by party electioneers.<sup>105</sup> Despite the state legislature's banning of the practice,<sup>106</sup> by the time of Fearon's visit, betting too seemed to be an accepted feature of Election Day, as suggested by his reprisal of a scene on election eve among a group of party organizers: "What will you give Finlay in Lower Delaware Ward?" "One hundred." "And what to Hiester?" "Three hundred." "Give Bill three and a half, and I'll take you for five hundred." "No: I'll give him three and a half for a pair of boots." "Guess I'll take you for a pair and a hat.—What for Dock Ward?" "I won't bet on Dock: they're all a set of d----d Tories."<sup>107</sup> Like the men in this passage, bettors often wagered not on victory but on the difference in votes, much in the same way as modern sports betting generally revolves around the spread

(and probably for the same reason, namely, that one candidate or another was by this point considered a strong favorite, and the only real question was how much the vote difference would be).<sup>108</sup> The sums involved in many of these bets are impressive, given the times—up to \$3,500 in one report.<sup>109</sup> Men could find themselves ruined by an unlucky Election Day.<sup>110</sup>

As the activities of the militia and the betting men suggest, a great deal more than voting occurred on Election Day. Like the Republicans of the 1796 Election, Philadelphians used the day as a sort of popular political theater. In 1828, John Binns noted supporters of Andrew Jackson moving about the city with hickory sticks in the air, driving about with busts of Jackson on their carriages, and a man dressed in “American colors,” riding a white horse and waving the hickory poll, who went up to a picture of the general and bowed three times.<sup>111</sup> Four years later, the production was even more elaborate, as a mock corvette, dubbed the Good Ship “United States,” rode about the streets surrounding the election grounds, stopping occasionally in front of Democratic bars, and eventually ending up in front of the Bank of the United States. “What is your cargo?” yelled the partisan audience. “Sound currency!” the crew replied in unison. Then, the captain pointed to an imaginary ship some distance away. “What ship is that?” he cried out. “The braggart,” the crowd cried back. “Who commands that ship?” “Henry Clay!”<sup>112</sup>

At night, men and boys would march about with tubs of tar or wagon wheels set afire. These night parades often came after the local vote had been counted, and one or other of the sides could declare victory over the city’s vote.<sup>113</sup> It was generally

during these evening parades when the Election Day violence, simmering for much of the day, exploded into an actual riot. On at least two occasions, in 1832 and 1840, riots broke out when a parade of Democrats marched past Carel's. The second time the Democrats rushed into the bar, broke windows, and the interior of the bar itself. The fight that resulted sent dozens of men to a nearby hospital.<sup>114</sup> Gangs of Jackson supporters attacked the house of John Binns the nights of the 1828 General and Presidential elections, and, according to him, threw bricks or stones at his house, and attempted to break down the door.<sup>115</sup>

Actual homicide was not frequent, but not unheard of, either. In 1834, a battle between Whigs and Democrats in the city's Moyensing neighborhood resulted in a death.<sup>116</sup> Several men died during perhaps the city's most famous Election Day riots of the period, the California House riots. On that occasion, the state militia was actually called out and brought forth a cannon to control the crowd.<sup>117</sup> By 1840, Sidney Fisher noted, "a resort to brute force has now become expected,"<sup>118</sup> and the city's reputation for Election Day hooliganism was such that Isaac Mickle wrote in his diary that in Philadelphia, "party spirit usually rages with more violence than any other section of the Union."<sup>119</sup>

And yet, given the degree of violence in the urban culture as a whole, given the tensions which the social changes to the city had wrought, and given the impetus to conflict provided by the political contest, the fact that Philadelphians frequently took to fighting each other in the streets on Election Day may be less impressive than that they did not do so even more frequently, and with even greater violence. Writing of an

Election Day in 1817, Fearon noted: "The excitement of party and pecuniary feeling, by the universality of gambling upon the occasion, was very great; yet there was no confusion, no disturbance."<sup>120</sup> Relieved to see less violence at the polls than he had expected one Election Day, Isaac Mickle noted "that every thing was conducted with great order and decorum. There were no fights, no clamorous debates...fanaticism was evinced by the words and actions of no man. Each exercised the rights of a freeman, and left his fellow freeman unmolested to enjoy theirs. So may it ever be!"

#### The media's role: the interpretation

As was the case in American culture generally, the role of the mass media at this time became more visible in the Election Day performance and, in a sense, more central to that performance.<sup>121</sup> The discussion of the party's role in Election Day has already demonstrated how party leaders came to use the paper as an organizing tool and as mobilizing device. But the news media, both partisan and non-partisan alike, also served a role as interpreters of what the Election Day meant, and as critics of the performance.

For the partisan editor, victories were easy enough to explain: they demonstrated the good sense of the public, the rightness of the cause, and the excellence of democracy generally as a form of government. "The result of the late election is such as might be expected from the people of Pennsylvania. Corruption, cabal, foreign influence, degenerate coalitions and degenerate politics have been discomfited."<sup>122</sup> "The fact is, that the People are beginning to awake from their

lethargy, as those who have been in the habit of abusing their good natural confidence will ere long discover to their shame and confusion.”<sup>123</sup> “The result of the late election demonstrates that the PEOPLE condemn and reprobate the system of cabal by which the ruling party has so long retained and hoped to continue the government by their own hands... We hail, and all good men will unite with us in hailing the happy omen of future good.”<sup>124</sup> Often, and especially in the 1830s and after, when larger and bolder types came more into use, the headline alone could serve as interpretation. Celebrating positive returns from Delaware, the *Gazette* announced the state, “Redeemed! Regenerated!! AND DISENTHRALLED!!!”<sup>125</sup> Victories in Maryland and Ohio were headed with an imprint of a flag and the American Eagle, and the announcement: “ALL HAIL!! O.K.K.K.” “GLORIOUS TRIUMPH”<sup>126</sup> A victory was always a victory, but a loss was not necessarily a loss. If the vote total could be compared to one of a year before, and if the margin of the opposition victory was smaller this year than last, then this was evidence of the trend toward eventual success in November.<sup>127</sup>

Sometimes, of course, defeat would have to be acknowledged, but here certain tried and true strategies were at hand. Defeat at the polls could be explained away by reference to opposition corruption and misbehavior. It was the responsibility of partisan and corrupt Inspectors who failed to enforce the laws, of corrupt and secret deals, of alliance between factionalists and tories.<sup>128</sup> As always, class and ethnic prejudice could be depended upon to support the argument. The *Gazette* blamed the gross frauds of illegal voting on foreign elements attempting to take control of the

political system. "It is a fact not to be disguised that under this [voting] law when enforced in all its integrity, foreigners rule the city of Philadelphia. They creep into every official vacancy; they poison the minds of native Americans by their foreign partialities and antipathies, and pollute the fountains of private confidence and intercourse." It warned its readers to look well to the next (ie., the Presidential) election. "We have a stronger security than a legislative act, that this imposition will not be pronounced legal and that is the mistrust they have of one another."<sup>129</sup> There was little doubt about which "foreigners" the editor of the *Gazette* had in mind. In a recap of an ward election during the period, he noted that a leader of the opposition party (probably Binns), "in a dialect so broad it would have excited laughter even in Dery, rallied his host of foreigners by calling out, "This is the *American side*."<sup>130</sup>

The newspaper provided interpretation through its form as well as its content. The integration of party propaganda and the development of the mass media's ability to place Philadelphia's Election Day in the context of the national event was quickly evolving from the Federalist period. Even by the 1810s, the returns of elections in other states are notably more numerous than they had been twenty years before. By the 1830s and 1840s, a fall in which a Presidential campaign was held was really a succession of Election Days, starting with some New England states at the beginning of September, then spreading out to the rest of the country. Philadelphia's own election season began with the ward elections for Inspectors, then the General Election, and then the climatic event in November. By the end of the era, reporters admitted of the October Election Day that, "[i]n fact the contest of Tuesday was but a

preliminary action, in which the two parties, as it were, measured their strength a little, preparatory to the final and decisive struggle in November next.”<sup>131</sup> At roughly the same time that this structure appeared, the turnouts for Presidential and General elections changed places in the state of Pennsylvania. Prior to the Jacksonian period, General Elections were usually better attended than Presidential ones. After 1840, the reverse was the case.<sup>132</sup>

Perhaps because of the different roles that the General Election day and the Presidential Election Day played in the campaign drama, the style of interpretation was often different. Corruption in the General Election could be used as a partisan tool, to rally the troops. But losses in November were taken more philosophically. After a entire fall of attacking the Democrats as, essentially, violent foreign agents in the pay of the Pope, *The North American*, in declaring Pierce’s victory, announced that “the day is lost, and the field is left to the victors... We have reason, just reason, to complain of the stratagems which have been practiced against us,” the paper noted, then added sadly, “But after all, it would seem that fate is more at war with us.”<sup>133</sup> Such feelings were echoed by at least some within the voting public itself. The loyal Democrat Isaac Mickle was forced to listen to three nights of cannon fire as the Whigs celebrated Harrison’s 1840 victory (the mayor had outlawed parades in this case to avoid violence).<sup>134</sup> By the third day, however, he wrote in his diary that the “poor devils have the chance to rejoice so seldom that I cannot find it in me to envy them.” Defeat, Mickle thought, would in the end be the salvation of his own party, making it purer, and its union firmer.<sup>135</sup> The fact that the contest would continue, some time in

the future, allowed the loser to accept the result with more grace than he might otherwise have done.<sup>136</sup>

**Philadelphia's *Public Ledger* and the anti-party voices: an alternative interpretation**

Given the style of the Jacksonian Election Day, it is not surprising that the day had its critics, many of whom came from atop the economic and social strata of Philadelphia society. These were men who might have expected, in an earlier, more deferential age, to have dominated the politics of the city. That they did not, that they increasingly found themselves on the outside looking in, did not go un-remarked. The failure of democracy to allow these men their due, created in many of them a marked distaste for electoral politics and for the sort of boorish behavior that even at its best marked a nineteenth century election in Philadelphia. In 1806, Thomas Cope, serving as a judge for a special election, noted with dismay that some men would swear to anything to vote. A Federalist of the early nineteenth century, Cope well understood that his party was increasingly unable to compete, a fact he charged to the "Democrats'" willingness to draw on the support of immigrant Irish and French voters, many of whom, he suspected, were ineligible.<sup>137</sup> A harsher verdict was delivered by diarist Sidney Fisher, who rarely had a good word to say about the democracy or elections generally, and who claimed to always vote against the mob, on principle. "These elections are a curse," Fisher railed in his diary. "Every four years this system of agitation and excitement is gone thro' with."<sup>138</sup> As a Whig, and therefore in some sense the political and philosophical descendant of Cope's



Federalists, Fisher also distrusted the populism of the opposition Democrats, and assumed that they would stoop to personation and bribery with the minimum of provocation. “The frauds developed recently in New York show a system of corruption & baseness, so extensive, so low, so degrading, so utterly shameless that they fill the mind with disgust, indignation, & alarm.”<sup>139</sup>

But not all of the criticism of Election Day came from the disappointed arrogance of the would-be ruling class. Perhaps the most prominent of populist critics of Election Day were on the editorial staff of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, one of the first and most successful of the city’s penny presses. The editors, William Swain, Arcenah S. Abell, and Azariah H. Simmons, were from New York City, and based their paper’s economics and journalistic style on early New York prototypes like James Bennett’s *New York Herald*.<sup>140</sup> Like Bennett’s paper, the *Public Ledger* was dramatically and self-consciously different from other newspapers at the time. Copy tended to focus on crime and human interest, generally to the exception of politics. Because the penny paper aimed to present its readers with hard-eyed, empirical “truth,” the editors of such presses, men like Bennett and the owners of the *Public Ledger* looked upon politics with suspicion and often a kind of contempt. This was part and parcel of a wider worldview of the penny paper, the attempt to free journalism from the dictates of prejudice, including political prejudice, and to rely on the observable fact, the datum.<sup>141</sup>

Eventually, this belief would become generalized throughout American journalism and lead to a valorization of “objectivity” in journalistic style. In 1836,

however, Messrs. Swain, Abell and Simmons were well aware that they were presenting something new and unfamiliar to Philadelphia readers. Much of their writing emphasized the difference between their penny papers and the partisan sheets which mostly made up the opposition, and the editors, acting a prophets of a new age in mass media, made the most of the difference, by highlighting their distaste for the sort of prejudicial copy found in Whig or Democratic papers and for the ridiculous, often corrupt behavior displayed on Election Day and throughout the campaign.

So that during the election of 1836, for example, the paper generally eschewed political coverage and focused instead on hounding out of the city an “oculist” named Smith (the paper claimed he was an unconscionable quack).<sup>142</sup> When it did deign to address political stories, the *Public Ledger’s* editorial policy was ostentatiously and consistently “independent.” While the paper seems to have favored Democratic candidates far more than Whig or opposition candidates during this period, it was mostly just contemptuous of political parties and of partisan papers generally.<sup>143</sup> The disavowal of partisan affiliation was likely part of a more general strategy among the penny press to reach as wide an audience as possible, but it also fit into a longstanding and rather widespread distrust of political factions. The pages of the *Public Ledger* caricatured partisans as “these poor moles who grope in the dark in pursuit of one idea,” their heads being not large enough to contain two.

What gentlemen! cannot you conceive such a thing as independence of mind? Cannot you imagine that one can take counsel of his own understanding and give utterance to some other than borrowed sentiments?

The actual campaigns of Van Buren and Harrison were nothing to the editors of the *Public Ledger*. What interested them were political ideals and principles.<sup>144</sup> A reader foolish enough to ask the editors whether it was true that Van Buren rode about in a coach and four and wore kid gloves, received this cold reply:

We consider it of very little consequence what Mr. Van Buren or any other man wears, or how he rides...Suppose any public man should wear white gloves or go bear (sic) handed, does that make him less a statesman, less a patriot or less a republican?<sup>145</sup>

The *Public Ledger* referred to political life in order to criticize it, and to contrast it with an idealized model of what the editor's argued was the proper politics for a true republic. Not surprisingly, the behavior of citizens on Election Day generally exasperated the *Public Ledger*. It compared, for example, the actions of teenage boys hauling a small boat filled with lit tar barrels to "children of larger sort, who were spending their time and ruining their health in electioneering for Tom, Dick and Harry, who the next day would spurn them beneath their feet."<sup>146</sup> Instead of editorials encouraging the partisan faithful to get out and vote, readers of the *Public Ledger* saw pleas for Election Day calm. The actual result was of no concern to the editors, but they found the disturbances and murders to be an outrage. "Let us have no vain glorious boasting, no Bombastes Furioso declamations; no vaunting over a success."<sup>147</sup>

It was Election Day betting, however, that worked up the most righteous indignation on the part of the *Public Ledger*. The paper kept up an ongoing campaign against the "vile, profligate, wicked, law-breaking, law-defying system of gaming."<sup>148</sup> Bets on the election were placed everywhere: on the floor of the Exchange, on street

corners, in insurance offices, on shop floors. Many citizens, doubtless, did not even know that it was illegal. Election Day betting was harmful in part because it allowed heartless black-legs to fleece honest members of the public, but more importantly, it threatened the whole democratic structure of the country. Fitness for office should be the sole motive of the vote, the editors argued. Betting made the voter overlook the public consideration in favor of private gain. The effect was to make men act against their better convictions, and to encourage others to do so. The paper even went so far as to equate betting on the election with treason.<sup>149</sup>

The *Public Ledger*, then, hated the partisan Election Day for its violence, for its unthinking and often base displays of irrationality, for the way it promoted private interest over public good. The distrust of party was a strong a tradition in American political rhetoric, as was its continued existence in political practice. We have already run across an example of it in the pages of Federalist era journalism, and much of the *Public Ledger's* anti-party rhetoric echoed the sentiments of earlier commentators.

There was, for example, the comparisons of the vote to a sacred rite:

From what motive should a citizen enter a place of public worship? To return thanks for the past, and to pray for the good of himself and his fellow creatures. Any other motive to the performance of a religious duty is profane and criminal.

To make sure readers got the point, editors argued that the elective franchise had a direct and especial reference to “the will of God, the happiness of mankind, and is therefore a religious duty.” Because of this, the paper argued that not only should voters convince themselves that their motives were “pure and holy,” but that all

violence and attempts to obstruct the vote were sins against God as well as the people.<sup>150</sup>

At times, the paper's anti-party feeling during the election was so strong that it led to a denigration of politics altogether. Following the Presidential election of 1836, the paper argued that the success of one candidate or the other was irrelevant to the welfare of the nation. Although it predicted an economic slide should Harrison be elected, the lead editorial argued that by and large the health of America depended more on the efforts of businessmen than politicians.<sup>151</sup> After Franklin Pierce's election in 1852, the paper ridiculed the notion that Pierce had been elected for any policies he may have promoted. In fact, the candidate had studiously avoided any talk of policies, the editors wrote. Moreover, they argued, it was the exactly this hollow core at the center of Pierce's political personality that recommended him for the job, since he would not feel bound to any one group once he took office.<sup>152</sup>

It was not only penny papers or the social elite in Philadelphia that were attacking the violence and misbehavior on Election Day. A popular polemicist such as John Binns scorned the irrationalism of the Election Day democratic crowds worshipping at the feet of the Great General Jackson, "the savage shouts of victory, the war-whoops of exhaltation," as much as any high-minded aristocrat, and even partisan editors during the Jacksonian era often breathed a sigh of relief once the election was over.<sup>153</sup> An avowed party paper like *The Pennsylvanian* criticized the way that many citizens celebrated the day, arguing that it had a "baneful effect on the elective franchise."<sup>154</sup> The Pro-Whig *United States Gazette* promoted its preferred

slate of candidates for the 1838 constitutional convention by the fact that they were unpledged to any political group, and therefore free to vote their consciences. It railed against “Men who are indebted for their notoriety to the extravagance of their doctrines, whose watchword is Party, and whose hope is Spoils—political wreckers who watch the tide of party strife less to preserve than to destroy.”<sup>155</sup>

Alexander Cummings, editor and publisher of the *Evening Bulletin*, was somewhat calmer in his opinions. Cummings was willing to grant the Jacksonian Election Day a certain color and vitality, especially writing in the nostalgic mode, as in the early 1850s, when he thought that the decision to split the election grounds up into a ward system had effectively destroyed the Election Day celebration (he would be wrong about that).<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, the *Bulletin's* discussion of Election Day implied a sort of progress away from that sort of event. As voters became more rational, as the changes in laws relating to voting and elections took effect, Election Day would become calmer, less open to corruption. Some of the extravagances of the moment would be lost, of course, but these were necessary sacrifices.<sup>157</sup> Not surprisingly, given that his paper was originally called the *Telegraph Evening Bulletin*, much of this improvement would be the result of modern improvements in communication technologies. The telegraph could eliminate corruption in the vote count, for example, because it presented returns all at once, and made changing the vote in response to earlier returns impossible. Thus the Machine destroyed the deceptions of Party. “It sends the contradictions of a falsehood close upon its heels and prevents any mischief or injustice being done by any party.”<sup>158</sup> More than that, it

delivered the results in an incredibly short time. In 1840, the news of Harrison's victory did not reach the city of Philadelphia until five days after its own vote.<sup>159</sup> In 1852, the *Bulletin* was able to announce Pierce and King victors the day after the Election.<sup>160</sup>

The attacks on the Election Day celebration came from two directions, then, in the pages of the city's newspapers. On the one hand, a journal like the *Public Ledger* drew on a by-now long tradition of attacking the nature of partisanship and factionalism. Despite its popular audience, this argument was essentially a conservative one. In attacking the populist style of contemporary Election Day, the *Public Ledger* essentially echoed the criticisms of men like Isaac Norris and John Fenno. In the writings of these earlier critics, and especially in Norris's private letters about the rude behavior of the city's popular classes on Election Day, this critique of style also carried the implication of a class critique. Certain people—"butchers," "tanners," working class "Jacobins"—could generally be found engaging in these untoward celebrations. Since the *Public Ledger* was democratic in its political sympathies, its attack on the style in which Philadelphians conducted themselves on Election Day did not extend, at least explicitly, to a class critique. Instead, it simply shaded into an attack on electoral politics generally. The other dismissal of the Election Day celebration came from the pages of the *Bulletin*, in which the triumph of technology would lead to a more sober and rational ritual of the vote. That argument was not linked with the sort of argument that the *Public Ledger* was making. In the

future, however, reformers of Election Day would increasingly turn to technology in order to help them solve the problem of the Election Day celebration.

### Black Americans and Philadelphia's Election Day:

The battle over political identity on Philadelphia's Election Day, the battle among the public over what it ought to look like, did not include all members of the city. Notably, it did not include the black residents of Philadelphia. In fact, their absence was striking enough that Alexis de Tocqueville noted it on his visit to the city in the early 1830s. When he asked his guide whether Negroes were forbidden from voting, the response was that there was no law forbidding them to vote, but that they stayed away from the polls for reasons of personal safety. A black man presenting himself at a Philadelphia poll on Election Day, de Tocqueville's interlocutor said, would have been severely beaten.<sup>161</sup>

Almost from the beginning of the republic, any public presence of black Americans in the city of Philadelphia during moments of community or national celebration was a vexed business. Their appearance in a Fourth of July parade provoked a riot in 1803, and they were generally not welcome to the day's festivities after that.<sup>162</sup> Eventually, they created their own civic celebration on New Year's Day. A group of Negro masons held an annual march every June, but it was often the subject of arch commentary, even outright mockery, by whites.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, on Election Day, black Philadelphians were seen at the edges of the celebration, as observers only, or were forced to operate behind the scenes. When African Americans



wanted to exercise their democratic rights, they did so out of sight of white people, as in the case of Joseph Forten. Forten was a wealthy sail-maker, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and one of the African American community's most respected citizens. In 1826, a newly elected congressman from the city met Forten in the street. Forten expressed a great deal of admiration for the congressman's politics, and added—much to the astonishment of the other man—that on Election Day he had taken about 14 or 15 white men who worked in his shop to the polls and ordered them to vote for the man. Forten's wealth gave him some power in the political realm, but it had to be exercised quietly, that is, in the private realm of economics.<sup>164</sup>

This public invisibility would begin to change in the decade of the 1830s. By the late 1820s, the absence of black Philadelphians at the polls had become something of a scandal for the community. Black journalists and reformers from New York and elsewhere chastised Philadelphia's black leaders for failing to be more assertive on the matter.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, black Philadelphians were becoming more aggressive in claims on their rights as citizens of a democracy. They created a national abolitionist society, headquartered in the city, and constructed a building to house it. They began to press politicians to provide them with the practical support to exercise their civil rights.<sup>166</sup> The informal ban against black voters also seemed to be breaking down. In the western counties, where land was easier to get—and voting criteria easier to meet—and where blacks formed a smaller percentage of the population than they did in Philadelphia, blacks did vote. This state of affairs confused even the state's

governor, John Schulze, who noted at one point that the word “freeman” apparently referred to blacks in some parts of the commonwealth but not to others.<sup>167</sup>

The debate over the black vote came to a head in early 1837, when a statewide convention met to consider changes to the 1790 constitution. The legal argument centered over the question of what the framers of the 1790 constitution had meant when they declared that all “freemen” in the state who met the residency and tax criteria had the right of franchise. Defenders of black enfranchisement argued that, absent any further definition, the term had to refer to all adult males of any color. Their opponents argued that “freeman” was a technical term that could not, by definition, refer to black men.<sup>168</sup> Democrats began to press the issue almost as soon as the convention met. Philadelphia’s relative closeness to the South was part of the problem. Some Democrats argued that, should blacks be allowed to vote, it would encourage internal immigration to the city among free blacks living in the southern states.<sup>169</sup>

Election Day in the fall of 1837 brought debate to a boil, when Democrats in Bucks County decided that they had lost several races due to black votes. There is little doubt that several black farmers showed up at a poll in Bucks county that year to vote, much less evidence that it had any substantial effect on the outcome. Democratic opponents made much of the fact that some of these men had been carrying guns, but this was a practice that seems to have been a common among the state’s rural populations at the time, both white and black.<sup>170</sup> In any case, the angry Democrats decided to take the case to court. Several months later, the state’s supreme court sided

with the more restrictive view of the constitution, and decided that the constitution forbade blacks from voting.<sup>171</sup>

In fact, though, the court's decision had been made moot by events during the spring of 1838. Democratic members of the convention, riding a tide of indignation prompted, in part, by the Bucks county controversy, pushed through a resolution explicitly limiting the franchise to white adult males.<sup>172</sup> In doing so, Pennsylvania lawmakers were following the lead of other Northern states—New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, and Connecticut—that had disenfranchised African Americans in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in most southern states blacks had never had the right to vote).<sup>173</sup> Black civil rights groups in both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh protested the move, but their efforts were useless. Since there was no clear political gain to be made from defending black enfranchisement, most of the opposition to the Democrats at the constitutional convention was timid at best.<sup>174</sup> Blacks were caught in an electoral catch-22. They could not punish or reward their political supporters or opponents at the polls by voting, in the way that other groups could, and because they lacked this fundamental political power, their right to vote was an easy sacrifice. “Thus it is necessary for the people of color to keep up an incessant *begging* of their *rulers* to legislate in their behalf,” angrily wrote Joseph Willson, a respected member of the city's black community, “and with what effect is well known to all.”<sup>175</sup>

By denying blacks the right to vote along with the rest of the nation on Election Day, white Pennsylvanians were essentially denying them the status of full moral agents. John Joseph Gurney, a British Quaker, quoted a story that made the

rounds in Philadelphia in the period following the disfranchisement. "I was told that a white boy was observed taking seizing the marbles of a coloured boy in one of the streets, with the words, '*You have no rights.*'"<sup>176</sup> Whether the story is true or not, it reflects a belief among the city's population that in losing the legal right to vote, blacks had lost their claim to count in American society.

Yet while the law legally barred black Philadelphians from Election Day, this did not settle the matter. In fact, black citizens arguably were more publicly visible following the change than before it. In the late afternoon of the Presidential Election Day of 1840, a group of young boys and men hauling a small rolling ship containing burning hogshead barrels passed the Mother Bethel AME church on sixth street. There, they received some "strange indignity, which passion could not brook," coming from some men inside. A fight between blacks and whites ensued. The white party then left, only to return later and begin pelting the church with rocks.<sup>177</sup> More dramatic were the infamous California House riots of 1849. On the General Election of that year, a street gang known as the "Killers," hired to protect Democratic voters at some of the polls, moved on from their Election Day duties to the California House Hotel on South Street, which was owned and operated by a mixed race couple. At the bar, they met up with some revelers from the Moymensing neighbor and other parts of the city, then proceeded to attack the mulatto owner and some of the bar's clientele. They also lit a fire to the building, which spread to the surrounding houses (a fire company attempting to put out the fire was beaten off by a mob.) After this, the gang began to move through the neighborhood and began "hunting nigs"—that is, looking for any

black body they could find to beat. More fires were lit and more riots occurred the next day, and eventually the militia were called in, and a cannon brought forth to clear the streets. Estimates ranged from three to four men killed, and 25 wounded seriously enough to go to the hospital.<sup>178</sup>

The celebration of Election Day was a performance of the nation: it declared who was to qualify as an American, and who was not. It helped give shape to a communal identity. But in order for it to do this, Americans needed to make the lines of membership clear, and that in turn required a certain level of violence to hold them fast. Fights between blacks and whites in the streets of Philadelphia on Election Day, or fights between Nativist and immigrant voters, were not simply the momentary eruptions arising from the tensions that came from living in a crowded, overextended urban environment of the 1830s. They were physical struggles over who would be included in the performance of the nation, and who would be left out.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a citizen could be defined through his economic status. This rationale was gradually disappearing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, as economic barriers to voting fell. A new form of exclusion was hit upon: the racial difference. Given both their ambiguous relationship to the nation and their general lack of economic or political power, it was inevitable that Election Day would end up defining Negroes as being outside the boundaries of the nation.<sup>179</sup> If the right to vote was no longer a way to distinguish the dependable landowner from the servant or the transient, it at least served as a way to distinguish the true member of the nation—the white man—from his black counterpart. The reason the black farmers of Bucks county

created such an uproar in the fall of 1837 is that they threatened the lines of the nation that white America's Election Day was working so hard to define.

**Conclusion:**

The movement of Philadelphia's population on a Presidential Election Day mirrored the movement of the country as a whole; it enacted at the physical, civic level what was happening at the imaginative, national level. As the large bell in the State House pealed, the voter made his way to the polls, from the various parts of the city into the center of the polity, congregating there with the rest of his fellow citizens, many of whom differed from him in terms of class, religion, ethnic background, or political belief. What the presidential vote did to the city, it was doing to the nation; pulling together disparate geographic and tribal groups and binding them up into a whole. Journalists helped to link this city-wide celebration to a national one through a central mediated space, bringing voting results, reports of the day, and political rhetoric together on the pages of the newspapers.

In the city center, the Election Day participant could literally see the nation parade before him. He could watch the good ship United States as it rolled past him on its wheels. He could see the hickory sticks waving in the air, watch boys pulling tubs covered with flags. He could follow the transparencies of national leaders move past him with the marching bands. The arguments over national banks, currency, political manipulations would have been difficult for many to follow. Easier to understand would have been the cajoling and disputes between neighbors on the election grounds.

The fight over paper money or the development of a national infrastructure, transformed into a drunken brawl between two men in front of the polling window, is a fight made solid and concrete. It is the political body given an actual, as opposed to a metaphorical, existence.

On Election Day, a man could see what sort of people supported the Democracy, or the Whigs, or the Anti-Masons, could see with whom he fit. Partisans from both sides gave elaborate explanations as to why the victory of the one party would lead to general wealth and prosperity, the victory of their opponents to national ruination. These sorts of predictions would take time to come to an affect, if they ever did. For the men who bet on Jackson or Harrison in the Stock Exchange or in the taverns or in the insurance brokerages, on the other hand, Election Day brought immediate knowledge. They knew precisely how the victory or loss affected their immediate financial condition. They could see the money change hands. The celebrations of teenagers dragging boats and blazing tar barrels through the street or dancing around a bonfire, or bands blaring, or men cheering as they heard the first returns—these were likewise an embodied celebration of democracy, much different from the sober, reverent descriptions of the vote that appeared in the popular press. What is especially important to understand is that this performance was not simply a “symbolic” reflection of the “actual” politics that were going on at the time. The politics that took place on Election Day was as real as at any other time or place: a black eye from a fight, a lost bet, a scar from a fire, were all real events, real effects of the election battle. Election Day in Philadelphia during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

allowed citizens to *see what American democracy was*, on the ground, in front of their very eyes.

This ability to mark the public, to express through the actions of the citizens themselves, and to integrate that public into a larger national public, was not what distinguished the antebellum Election Day from the Federalist one. Nor was its paradoxical character, its ability to celebrate contrasting ideological concepts, such as party and nation. Where the two events differed was, first of all, in terms of elaboration. Philadelphians of the 1800s simply had more symbolic forms and a greater number of conventional practices at their disposal in order to create an image of politics and the nation on that day—betting, the use of fire, political theater, the development of the militia parade, the transparencies. The development of communication technologies, especially the telegraph, brought the acts of Philadelphians and other Americans into closer contact.

The key to this elaborate performance of the nation was the party. It was the party that provided the rationale and the provocation and pretty often the means for everything else that took place on Election Day. It was the institution of the party that provided the voter with the political identity that he enacted through voting, and through celebrating the vote, the party that created a common identity for celebrants in Philadelphia and those throughout the country. Through use of the party organization, party leaders were able to draw the individual partisan into a larger web of like-minded men, which spanned not simply a ward or city but the entire nation.<sup>180</sup> Through voting and through the other forms of partisan practice that took place on



Election Day like political theater, the display of political symbols like log cabins and hickory sticks, and the Election night parade, the Philadelphia voter was able to link the abstract notions of state and political program to his own world and his own efforts. It was the party that controlled the newspaper, and the partisan rhetoric that emanated from it. It was also the party that worked on the prejudices and differences within the civic body for its own purposes, and thus provided Election Day with much of the bitterness and violence that it engendered. Election Day was not simply a performance of national identity but a battle over national identity: it expressed the disagreements over who ought and ought not to be included in that public. It provoked debate over what that public was and how it ought to behave, and the standards that should define it, especially in the pages of non-partisan papers like the *Public Ledger* and the *Bulletin*.

This gets us to another difference between the Federalist and the Jacksonian Election Day, which was a difference in size, and hence in manageability. There were simply a lot more bodies on the Election grounds in 1840 than there had been in 1796. This made it more difficult for their political managers to control them. The party organization helped in this: it tried to steer the voters in the right place and have them make the right choices. But that same organization sometimes got away from its handlers. The committees of surveillance, whose responsibility it was to serve as the party's eyes and voice on the Election ground, were often directly responsible for getting involved in fights. Moreover, in drawing on the civic strains among class and

ethnicity to call the voters to arms, partisan rhetoric risked stirring them up too much, and causing a riot.

The image of the public that was thus communicated on the day was a resolutely democratic one, so much so, in fact, that it alarmed men like Sidney Fisher, and made even the editors the popular press a little nervous. At the same time, this was an image of paradoxical democracy. Certain groups were excluded from even the pretence of participating. Although women had a place in the Electoral politics of the age, the violent character of the day itself, combined with contemporary beliefs about feminine fragility, ensured that they would be excluded from voting on the State House grounds. Black Philadelphians were excluded more directly, through the use of Constitutional changes. Election Day was not simply the celebration of the common man; it was the celebration of his superiority to other members of the public, as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Silbey, *The American political nation*, pp. 16-32; William N. Chambers and Philip C. Davis, "Party, competition, and mass participation: the case of the Democratizing Party System, 1824-1852," in *The history of American Electoral Behavior*, eds. Joel H. Silbery, et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) pp. 174-197; Richard Hofstadter, *The idea of a party system: the rise of legitimate opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970); William G. Shade, "Political pluralism and party development: the creation of a modern party system, 1815-1852," in *The evolution of American electoral systems*, Paul Kleppner, et al, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 77-112; Scudson, *The good citizen*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Feldberg, *The turbulent era: riot and disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford) pp. 9-42.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Shriver Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1817-1832: a game without rules* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1940) p. 61; Charles McCool Snyder, *The Jacksonian heritage: Pennsylvania politics, 1833-1848* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania : Historical and Museum Commission, 1958) p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Barnhurst and Nerone have made a similar argument about the American press as a whole at this time, *Form of news*, pp. 58-67.

<sup>5</sup> For the role of patronage in Pennsylvania politics at this time, see Klein, *Game without rules*, pp. 66-69; Fearon, *Sketches of America*, pp. 137, 138. See also McCormick's claim that patronage played a great role in Mid-Atlantic provinces than other states in the early 1800s, *The Second American Party System: Party formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966) p. 103. A more general discussion of the manner in which patronage might goad the politically active is in Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude republic: Americans and their politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) pp. 39-46.

<sup>6</sup> See also McCormick, *Second American Party System*, p. 31.

- <sup>7</sup> Higginbotham, *The Keystone in the Democratic arch: Pennsylvania politics, 1800-1816*, Ph.D. dissertation in history, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 12-15.
- <sup>8</sup> The nickname is mentioned and explained in Higginbotham, *Keystone*, pp. 1, 2; even Federalist editors eventually acknowledged, explicitly or implicitly, the power of the Republicans in the state, see editorials in the *United States Gazette*, Oct. 22, 1816, p.2 (also known as *United States Gazette and true American*. All issues hereafter referred to as *U.S. Gazette*); and Nov. 5, 1816, p. 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Klein, *Game without rules*, pp. 49, 50. Also Higginbotham, *Keystone*, p. 20, 326. In alliance with a Democratic faction they could sometimes take the city's vote. See the returns for the Presidential vote, *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 2, 1816, p. 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Federalist Tickets and electioneering efforts on the day of the vote in 1817 are remarked by Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America: a narrative of a journey of Five thousand miles through the eastern and western states* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969 [1819]), pp. 138-146
- <sup>11</sup> In the city of Philadelphia, Republican divisions were often reflected in the public battles between two different and equally pugnacious Republican newspaper editors, John Binns of *The Democratic Press*, and William Duane, Bache's successor as editor of the *Aurora*. In fact, Duane would later claim that state Republican leaders had expressly brought Binns to the city to attack both him and his political ally, Dr. Michael Leib, a charge that would seem to be supported in Binns' own autobiography. Higginbotham, *Keystone*, pp. 136-140; Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 45; McCormick, *Second party system*, pp. 138-139; John Binns, *Recollections of the life of John Binns : twenty-nine years in Europe and fifty-three in the United States* (Philadelphia: T.K and P.G. Collins, 1854), p. 192.
- <sup>12</sup> McCormick, *Second Party system*, pp. 134, 147.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142; Alexander McClure, *Old time notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: John Winston, Co., pp. 202-221, 307-315); Mueller, *Whig party in PA*, pp. 208-235; Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage*, pp. 26 ff.
- <sup>14</sup> Russell Weigley, ed. *Philadelphia: a 300-year old history* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), pp. 280, 281, 309; Gary Nash, *First city: Philadelphia and the forging of historical memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002), pp. 144-174.
- <sup>15</sup> See Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's black elite : activism, accommodation, and the struggle for autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) pp. 1-3; Roger Lane, *Williams Dorsey's Philadelphia and ours: on the past and future of the black city in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) pp. xii, xiii.
- <sup>16</sup> Nash, *First city*, pp. 144-147.
- <sup>17</sup> Snyder, *Jacksonian heritage*, p. 9; Nash, *First city*, pp. 152-161.
- <sup>18</sup> Julie Winch, Introduction: Joseph Willson's Philadelphia," in *The elite of our people: Joseph Willson's sketches of Black upper-class life in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Julie Winch, (Ed.) (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 28.
- <sup>19</sup> D.I. Greenstein, "Politics and the urban process: the case of Philadelphia, 1800-1854," *Urban history yearbook: 1989* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989) p. 16; Nash, *First city*, pp. 163-64.
- <sup>20</sup> *Mechanic's Free Press*, Oct. 4, 1928, p. 2;
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1828, p. 2.
- <sup>22</sup> Jensen, "The search for modern values," pp. 57-63; Silbey, *American political nation*, pp. 159-175; Lee Benson, *The concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a test case* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1961); Formisano, "The new political history and the election of 1840," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23(4) 1993, pp. 661-682.
- <sup>23</sup> Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 270-287.
- <sup>24</sup> Jensen, "Search for modern values," pp. 60, 61.
- <sup>25</sup> D.I. Greenstein, "Politics and the urban process," p. 11.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>29</sup> McCormick, *The presidential game*, pp. 149-51; Snyder, *Jacksonian heritage*, p. 21; Barnhurst and Nerone, *Form of news*, pp. 63-67.

- <sup>30</sup> The role of the Jacksonian press in creating and organizing a public was initially put forward by de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 475-477. For a general argument about the role of the party press in politics, see Schudson, *The good citizen*, p. 121; Schudson, *Discovering the news: a social history of American newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) pp. 47-49
- <sup>31</sup> See, for example, *The Democratic Press* (hereafter referred to as *Democratic Press*) Oct. 24, 1812, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 20, 1812, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1812, 2; *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, (also known as *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, hereafter referred to as *Relf's*) Sept. 23, 1812, p. 2; Sept. 25, 1812 p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 4, 1836, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 30, 1840, p. 2; *Democratic Press*, Oct. 7, 1828, p.2.
- <sup>32</sup> Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, pp. 28, 29; For a discussion of the caucus system in Pennsylvania, see Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 52-55.
- <sup>33</sup> Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 56-58; Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, p. 41; McCormick, *Second party system*, p.p. 146, 147; Moisei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the organization of political parties*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964) pp. 22, 23. An example of a journalistic attack on the caucus system can found in a reprint of the Raleigh, NC, *Minerva*: "Presidential, what shall I call it?" *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1816, p. 2.
- <sup>34</sup> For an explanation of the convention system in Pennsylvania, see Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 58, and Snyder, *Jacksonian heritage*, pp.19-21. Snyder argues that the convention differed from the caucus system more in name than anything else. See also McCormick, *Presidential game*, pp. 143-44; and Ostrogorski, *Democracy and political parties*, p. 34, for more general discussions.
- <sup>35</sup> "To The Republican Electors," *Democratic Press*, Sept. 23, 1817, p. 2
- <sup>36</sup> *Relf's*, Sept. 23, p. 2; Sept. 25, p. 2, 1812; *Political and Commercial Register* (hereafter referred to as *Register*), Oct. 1, 1812, p. 1; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1812, 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Sept. 24, 1812, p. 3; *Democratic Press*, Oct. 8, 1819, p. 2
- <sup>37</sup> But did not disappear, see: *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 1, 1832, p. 2; *Pennsylvanian*, Sept. 1, 1840, p. 2; *The American Sentinel* (hereafter referred to as *American Sentinel*), Sept. 7, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup> *American Sentinel*, Jan. 1, 1836, p. 2; *Pennsylvanian*, July 16, 1836, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Sept. 1, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>39</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Sept. 10, 1836, p. 2; compared the ticket of the *U.S. Gazette*, Sept. 1, 1840, p. 2, with that of Sept. 30, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, p. 58.
- <sup>41</sup> Silbey, *American political nation*, pp. 48-56.
- <sup>42</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 13, 1812, p. 2; also *Relf's*, Oct. 13, 1812, p. 2;
- <sup>43</sup> *Democratic Press*, Oct. 8, 1811, p. 2
- <sup>44</sup> "A CONFREEREE," to FELLOW CITIZENS. *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1816, p. 2.
- <sup>45</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1840, p.2
- <sup>46</sup> *The North American and Daily Advertiser* (also known as *The North American and United States Gazette*, hereafter referred to as *North American*) Oct. 31, 1844, p. 2; also, *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 8, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>47</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1812, p. 2; see also, *Democratic Press*, Oct. 14, 1828, p. 2.
- <sup>48</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1812, p. 2; *Register*, Oct. 29, 1812, p. 2.
- <sup>49</sup> *Democratic Press*, Sept. 23, 1817, p. 2; another example can be found in *Aurora*, Oct. 10, 1820, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 9, 1832.
- <sup>51</sup> "To The Washington Association." *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1812, p. 2.
- <sup>52</sup> *North American*, Oct. 25, 1844, p. 2
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1844, p.2
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1844, p.2.
- <sup>55</sup> *Democratic Press*, Oct. 12, 1812, p. 2
- <sup>56</sup> *American Sentinel*, Nov. 4, 1836, p. 2; also VINDEK POPULI, *American Sentinel*, Sept. 20, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>57</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 1,, 1844, p.2
- <sup>58</sup> *Relf's*, Oct. 13, 1812, p. 3.

- <sup>59</sup> "Dastardly Murder," "The Tiger Laps Blood: The Murdered Youth" and other articles. *North American*, Nov. 6, 1848, p. 1, 2
- <sup>60</sup> *North American*, Nov. 7, 1848, p. 1, 2.
- <sup>61</sup> "A CONFREEREE," to FELLOW CITIZENS. *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1816, p. 2; *Democratic Press*, Oct. 9, 1815, p. 2; TO-MORROW. *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1840, p. 2
- <sup>62</sup> *North American*, Oct. 4, 1844, p. 2; *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 13, 1840, p. 2;
- <sup>63</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 16, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>64</sup> WARD ELECTIONS, *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 3, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>65</sup> See the returns in the *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1812, p.2; Oct. 12, 1816, p. 2; ; Oct. 13, 1816, p.2; also *Relf's*, Oct. 10, 1812, p.2; Nov. 2, 1816, p. 2. Also the article in *U.S. Gazette*, Sept, 19, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>66</sup> Fearon, *Sketches*, p. 138; *Democratic Press*, Oct. 6, 1817, p. 2.
- <sup>67</sup> Fearon, *Sketches*, p. 138; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1816, p. 2.
- <sup>68</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1840, p. 2; *North American*, Oct. 11, 1848, p. 2.
- <sup>69</sup> See the federalist circular published in Fearon, *Sketches*, p. 142; Silbey, *American political nation*, pp. 207, 208.
- <sup>70</sup> Milo M. Naeve, *John Lewis Krimmel: an artist in Federal America* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987), pp. 68, 75-78; Anneliese Harding, *John Lewis Krimmel: genre artist of the early republic* (Winterthur, Delaware: A Winterthur Book, 1994) pp. 84, 85. A picture of Krimmel's painting is also found in Kelly, *Election Day*, p. 55.
- <sup>71</sup> Oberholzer, *Philadelphia*, vol. II, p. 80, Thompson Westcott, *Historical Mansions of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1877) p. 127; *Bulletin*, Oct. 11, 1852, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1840, p.2;
- <sup>72</sup> "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>73</sup> Isaac Mickle, *A gentleman of much promise: the diary of Isaac Mickle, 1837-45*, ed., with an introd. by Philip English Mackey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977) p. 95.
- <sup>74</sup> *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, Covering the Years 1834-1871*, ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright (Philadelphia, PA: Historical Society of PA, 1967), p. 104.
- <sup>75</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1840, p.2; *North American*, Oct. 9, 1844, p. 2; *North American*, Nov. 2, 1844, p. 2.
- <sup>76</sup> VICTORY! VICTORY! *North American*, Oct. 9, 1844, p.2.
- <sup>77</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1840, p.2; Oberholzer, *Philadelphia*, vol. 2, pp. 80, 81.
- <sup>78</sup> Westcott, *Historical Mansions of Philadelphia*, p. 127.
- <sup>79</sup> *American Sentinel*, Oct. 30, 1828.
- <sup>80</sup> "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2
- <sup>81</sup> John Binns, *Recollections of the life of John Binns : twenty-nine years in Europe and fifty-three in the United States* (Philadelphia: T.K and P.G. Collins, 1854) p. 210.
- <sup>82</sup> *North American*, Nov. 2, 1844, p. 2; CITY BULLETIN and other articles, *Cummings Evening Telegraph Bulletin*, (also known as *Cummings Evening Bulletin*, and *Evening Bulletin*, hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*) Oct. 10, 1848, p. 2; TO-MORROW. *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1840, p. 2 "The Election." *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1840, p.2; "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2. "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2; "VICTORY! VICTORY!" *North American*, Oct. 9, 1844, p. 2; *Bulletin*, Oct. 10, 1848, p. 2. Oberholzer, *op cit*; Westcott, *Historical Mansions of Philadelphia*, p. 127
- <sup>83</sup> The change in law occurs in Sect 1: An act regulating elections, *Laws of PA*, 1851, p. 725.
- <sup>84</sup> Westcott, *Historical Mansions*, p. 127, *North American*, Oct. 12, 1864. p. 1.
- <sup>85</sup> Sects 69-71, An act regulating elections in this commonwealth, *PA Laws*, 1838-39, p. 533.
- <sup>86</sup> "The Election." *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1840, p.2.
- <sup>87</sup> *Bulletin*, Oct. 11, 1852, p. 2; also Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 65; These are different from the "vigilance committees" which were set up in the 1840s and 1850s as quasi-legal bodies: see Ryan, *Civic wars*, p. 143.
- <sup>88</sup> Westcott, *Historical mansions*, *op cit*.
- <sup>89</sup> Sects 60-66: An Act relating to elections in this commonwealth, *PA Laws*, 1838-39, pp. 532-33.

- <sup>90</sup> Sect. 66: An act..., *PA Laws*, 1838-39, p. 523.
- <sup>91</sup> Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America: a narrative of a journey of Five thousand miles through the eastern and western states* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969 [1819]) p. 139-140.
- <sup>92</sup> A VOTER, *U.S Gazette*, Oct. 6, 1812, p. 2.
- <sup>93</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Nov. 3, 1840, p. 2
- <sup>94</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 4, 1840, p. 2
- <sup>95</sup> See, for example, "The VOTE," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 15, 1840, p. 2; "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2; *CITY BULLETIN Bulletin*, Oct. 13, 1852, p. 2; *The Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* (also known as *The Public Ledger*, hereafter referred to as *Public Ledger*), Oct. 10, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>96</sup> *Public Ledger*, Nov. 5, 1840, p. 2; *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>97</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 18, 1840, p. 2 A later editorial praised the precinct system for cutting down on violence and crowding at the polls, *North American*, Nov. 6, 1860, p. 2.
- <sup>98</sup> *Aurora*, Oct. 10, 1820, p. 2.
- <sup>99</sup> *Aurora*, Nov. 1, 1824, p. 2. For a more general discussion of the organizations of parties, both on the day and throughout the election, see Silbey, *American Political Nation*, p.50 ff.
- <sup>100</sup> Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia*, pp. 80, 81.
- <sup>101</sup> "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>102</sup> See Sect. Four: An act to amend the act, *PA Statutes at large* 1803, p. 505.
- <sup>103</sup> "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2; Mickle, *A gentleman of much promise*, p. 223.
- <sup>104</sup> Fearon, *Sketches*, pp. 146, 147.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- <sup>106</sup> An act to ban the practice of wagering..., *PA Laws*, 1813, p.p. 462-63.
- <sup>107</sup> Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches*, p. 140-141.
- <sup>108</sup> Mickle, *A gentleman of much promise*, p. 87.
- <sup>109</sup> Binns, *Recollections*, p. 211.
- <sup>110</sup> Mickle, *A gentleman*, p. 97.
- <sup>111</sup> *Democratic Press*, Nov. 1, 1828, p. 2.
- <sup>112</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Nov. 3, 1832, p.2. The debates over whether to shift to a paper currency, and whether to create a national bank, were two of the more important issues in national politics at the time. Jacksonian Democrats, typically suspicious of a central authority, tended to oppose the Bank, and supported the established currency system. Henry Clay was the major opponent of Jackson during the 1832 election.
- <sup>113</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1848, p. 2
- <sup>114</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 10, 1832, p. 2; *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2; *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 31, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>115</sup> *Democratic Press*, Oct. 15, 1828, p. 2; *American Sentinel*, Oct. 16, 1828, p. 2; *Democratic Press*, Nov. 1, 1828, p. 2; Binns mentions the event in *Recollections*, pp. 255-56, but misidentifies the year.
- <sup>116</sup> Feldberg, *The turbulent era*, p. 58;
- <sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.
- <sup>118</sup> Quoted in Feldberg, *The turbulent era*, p. 57.
- <sup>119</sup> Mickle, *A gentleman of much promise*, p. 89.
- <sup>120</sup> Fearon, *Sketches*, p. 147.
- <sup>121</sup> The number of newspapers rose from 650 weeklies and 65 dailies in 1830 to 1,1141 weeklies and 138 dailies in 1840: Schudson, *Discovering the news*, p. 13; the increase in Pennsylvania was, if anything, more dramatic: 72 newspapers in 1810, to 110 newspapers in 1824, to 185 newspapers in 1840. Klein, *Game without rules*, p. 59.
- <sup>122</sup> The Election, *Democratic Press*, Oct. 19, 1812, p. 2.
- <sup>123</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 5, 1816, p. 2
- <sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1816, p. 2
- <sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1840, p. 2
- <sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1840, p. 2

- <sup>127</sup> *Democratic Press*, Oct. 15, 1818, p. 2; *U. S. Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1844, p. 2; *North American*, Oct. 14, 1844, p. 2.
- <sup>128</sup> *The Democratic Press*, Oct. 16, 1819, p. 2; "To the Four Democratick Election Judges." *U.S Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1812, p. 2; "The Election," *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 16, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>129</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1812, p. 2.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 7, 1812, p. 3.
- <sup>131</sup> *Bulletin*, Oct. 13, 1842, p. 2
- <sup>132</sup> Walter Dean Burnham, "Elections as Democratic Institutions," *Society*, 24(4) 1987, p. 40; also McCormick, *Second party system*, p. 141.
- <sup>133</sup> *North American*, Nov. 5, 1844, p. 2
- <sup>134</sup> Mickle, *A gentleman*, pp. 96, 97.
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- <sup>136</sup> Dayan and Katz, *Media events*, p. 36
- <sup>137</sup> Cope, *Diary*, p. 133.
- <sup>138</sup> Fisher, *Diary*, pp. 85, 103.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- <sup>140</sup> Frank Mott, *American Journalism: a history, 1690-1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) pp. 239-40; George Morgan, *The history of Philadelphia, the city of firsts* (Philadelphia: The Historical Publication Society, 1926) p. 182.
- <sup>141</sup> Schudson, *Discovering the news*, pp. 21, 22.
- <sup>142</sup> *Public Ledger*, Oct. 10, 1836, p. 3.
- <sup>143</sup> See attacks on the partisan press in *Public Ledger*, Nov. 8, p. 2; Nov. 10, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>144</sup> *Public Ledger*, Nov. 3, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1836, p.2.
- <sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1836, p.2.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* Nov. 14, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1852, p. 2.
- <sup>153</sup> Binns' remarks are found in *Democratic Press*, Nov. 1, 1828. See also the evidence cited in Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude republic*, pp. 33, 34. An earlier denunciation of party can be found in *The Whig Chronicle*, Nov. 2, 1812, by DEMOCRAT: "Is it not a lamentable fact that the adherents or supporters of men, who are offered as candidates for important trusts, even of the some political party, denounce each other as hypocrites, apostates—nay, tories, and hurl political anathemas on each others' heads to the disgrace of the republican character and cause."
- <sup>154</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, Nov. 14, 1836, p. 2.
- <sup>155</sup> *U.S. Gazette*, Nov. 4, 1836. That these words came directly under an advertisement of the Harrison Electoral ticket, a second convention ticket pledged to the Whigs, and publication of the location of "Democratic Whig" headquarters in the city suggests less that the writer was a hypocrite than that he, like most other Americans, was somewhat confused about what role party should play.
- <sup>156</sup> *Bulletin*, Oct. 11, 1852, p. 2.
- <sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1848, p. 2; *ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1852, p. 2;
- <sup>158</sup> *Bulletin*, Oct. 30, 1852, p. 2.
- <sup>159</sup> Mickle, *A gentleman*, p. 96.
- <sup>160</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1852, p. 2; as predicted by the editor the day before, *ibid.* Nov. 2, 1852, p. 2
- <sup>161</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 241, 242, note 4; The understanding seems to have been widely shared by both black and white residents of the city during this period. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: a social study* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1999), p. 371.

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- <sup>162</sup> Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: the formation of Philadelphia's Black community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) pp. 177, 181.
- <sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 255.
- <sup>164</sup> Winch, *Philadelphia's black elite*, p. 136.
- <sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137.
- <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91 ff.
- <sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- <sup>168</sup> Smith, "The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania."
- <sup>169</sup> Winch, *Philadelphia's black elite*, p. 139.
- <sup>170</sup> Edward Price, "The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 100(3) July, 1976, p. 358.
- <sup>171</sup> *Hobbs vs. Fogg. Reports of Cases, Pennsylvania Supreme Court*, Frederick Watts (ed.) (Philadelphia, James Kay, Jr. and Bro.: 1860) vol. VI, pp. 553-560.
- <sup>172</sup> Smith, "The end of Black Voting rights in Pennsylvania," p. 294.
- <sup>173</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to vote*, pp. 54-58.
- <sup>174</sup> Winch, *Philadelphia's black elite*.
- <sup>175</sup> Joseph Willson, *The elite of our people*, p. 374.
- <sup>176</sup> Julie Winch, introduction to *The elite of our people*, p. 27.
- <sup>177</sup> *Public Ledger*, Nov. 2, 1840, p. 2.
- <sup>178</sup> Descriptions of the California House riots can be found in Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia*, vol. II, p. 289; Feldberg, *Turbulent Era*, p. 59, and in *The Memorial History of the city of Philadelphia*, John Russell Young (ed.) (New York, New York History Co.: 1898) vol. II, pp. 226-227; Cope, *Diary*, p. 133.
- <sup>179</sup> Eric Foner notes that "[a]s democracy triumphed, the intellectual grounds for exclusion shifted from economic dependency to natural capacity," adding that following the 1800 election and the ideological victory of Jefferson, blacks' natural inferiority becomes more articulated. *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998) p. 71. Similarly, Mary Daly, *Civic Wars*, pp. 138, 139, argues that race gradually overtook class as the main political fault line in urban America over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>180</sup> Baker, *Affairs of party*, 281-287; Silbey, *American political nation*, pp. 48-65; and McCormick's comments on the 1840 election: *Second party system*, p. 342.



## **Chapter Six: Election Day in the Gilded Age**

Election Day in the so-called Gilded Age of America was a strange, gaudy, and passionate affair. Although it shared in some of the general tendencies of the age—a wonderment of technology, a strutting self-promotion, a seedy corruption caked over with ostentatious display—Election Day was also a distinctive moment in the life of a northern city like Philadelphia. One might say that it was the antebellum Election Day grown up—a more complicated event than the tribal clashes of the Jacksonian era. The problem of managing Election Day and its message was, if anything, more acute now than it had been in the earlier part of the century. In addition to an ever-increasing population, and the tensions brought upon by the war, two new groups began to publicly dispute the definition of the public that Election Day had created. The first challenge came from the black residents of the city, who gained the vote in 1870. The second came from the growing number of women who began to use the Election Day performance as a public stage for suffragette demands. There was also the continuing problem of violence, the growing outrage over voting corruption, and the role of patronage in the political system.

In a recent paper, Peter Simonson and Carolyn Marvin argue that the attempt to transform the election rituals of nineteenth century into more literate forms, and the creation of a more textualized notion of the voter and the citizen, was due to the desire among reformers to wrest control of these rituals messages from the popular crowds that celebrated them.<sup>1</sup> What I wish to highlight in this argument is the need for the political elite to control or manage the popular electoral message, since in this chapter,

I frame the question as one about how two different groups attempted to come up with strategies for doing that. The first, the city and the state's political leadership, attempted to control the Election Day performance through building upon the efforts of the antebellum party. These men began to develop a sophisticated set of political tools and a large network—a political machine—in order to get the individual voter to behave as they wanted him too. This meant using patronage and other forms of economic or social coercion, and the development of earlier practices and techniques, that enlisted the citizen in a series of events designed to create a partisan loyalty on the day of the vote. But a great deal of the machine's work was carried out on Election Day itself: part of this was simply organization, distributing tickets and keeping a partisan presence at polls, part of it also consisted of what the opponents of party considered rank corruption. Cries of Election Day bribery and illegal voting grew ever louder as the century wore on, not all of it coming from partisan opponents but from a group of reform-minded intellectuals, academics, and journalists.

This latter group also attempted to control the Election Day crowd, only for different purposes and with different means. The reformist mugwump looked with horror upon Election Day that the party boss had created, and decided to go after what he saw was one of the root causes of a corrupt American political system, which was a corrupt system of voting. Reformers tried using the mass media to spread their gospel of political reform, although this generally proved unsuccessful. However, the movement did manage to introduce a major change in the Election Day performance that would have a significant effect: the Australian ballot. This state-printed, secret

ballot did not do away with the urban machine, but it did change the social construction of what the vote meant, and shifted the balance of political power.

The city newspaper was where discourse of party and reform met. Although the city's newspapers were still generally tied to party, they also promoted reformist attacks on the machine, and tried to put forward the model of the independent voter that mugwumps wished to see on the election grounds. And, as the newspapers grew larger, and their role as commercial enterprises became more central to their identities, they increasingly began to develop a series of practices devoted not so much to the partisan audience but to a larger public. This meant that on Election night, Philadelphia's newspapers competed with one another to present the most impressive returns possible. This Election night spectacular worked to soften the lines of partisanship that the campaign had drawn, as did other practices, like the Election Day bet. By the turn of the century, the city's Election Day was a composite of a set of traditions that helped to publicly mark it off from the rest of the year. Already in place, however, were changes that would make future Election Days much less of a spectacular civic holiday, much more what the reformist mugwumps envisioned it should look like.

#### Election Day and the machine:

The "bossism" that marked politics in the Gilded Age was nowhere more evident than in the state of Pennsylvania, and especially in its largest city, which gained a certain national notoriety when Lincoln Steffens called it the "most corrupt

and most contented” city in the country, a city that even other cities could point to as, “the worst-governed city in the country.”<sup>2</sup> In his examination of American politics, James Bryce used the Philadelphia “Gas Ring” as an exemplary instance of urban political fraudulence in the United States, and portrayed its lead member, James McManes, as a typical boss in both style and personality.<sup>3</sup> McManes, who controlled a great deal of civic patronage from an unelected position on the city’s gas company, was also the model for a well-known satire of the period, Rufus Shapley’s *Solid for Mulhooly*.<sup>4</sup>

And yet it would be a mistake to think that the prevalence of bossism in Philadelphia during the Gilded Age meant that any one man was able to control the city’s politics. The image of one single, over-arching political machine that controlled the whole of city politics was a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon in Philadelphia, not a 19<sup>th</sup> century one. Republicans not only had to deal with powerful Democrats like Squire McMullen, virtually untouchable in his home Fourth Ward, or reformers like Alexander McClure. Like the early century Jeffersonians, they were constantly fighting among themselves. Sometimes, city leaders like Stokely or McManes would team up with the state machine to fight one another, or they might join forces with the Democrats. Alliances constantly shifted as various leaders battled each other in order to keep any one man from obtaining hegemony over the city’s government and patronage machine.<sup>5</sup> The Election Day contest did not disappear with the rise of the combine.

Election Day in the Gilded Age of the boss did have a distinctive style, a style that was both the *result* of machine politics, and helped *produce* the machine. To see how it worked, we can turn to the investigation of an 1872 election held to fill George Connell's seat in the state senate after Connell's death. The main contestants were the regular Republican nominee, Henry W. Gray, and McClure, a journalist and long-time Republican stalwart turned reformer. McClure was against the re-election of President Grant (whose administration was widely perceived to be a den of corruption) and favored a systematic restructuring of the state government. For the purposes of defeating Gray, he had entered into an alliance with the city's Democratic party. When he lost the election to Gray, McClure and several of his legislative allies called for an investigation into its voting procedures.<sup>6</sup>

It will come as no surprise to find out that the committee did indeed find widespread corruption in the taking of the vote. Debates over voting fraud in 19<sup>th</sup> century politics rarely extend to arguments over whether corruption existed, only about its extent, and whether or not bribery and other fraudulent practices can, in and of themselves, explain the relatively high rates of voter participation.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the McClure-Gray by-election, strong evidence was presented of fraudulent voting—both in terms of men voting multiple times, and so-called “personation,” or voting in another man's name. The committee also heard evidence that tended to support the charge of ballot tampering by Election officials.<sup>8</sup>

This was not the only matter on which the performance described failed to meet the quasi-religious behavior outlined by, say, the *Public Ledger's* editors of the

1830s. A number of the witnesses, for example, could not recall for whom it was that they voted. This was sometimes, but not always, because they were drunk; a few simply did not seem to think the actual name of the candidate was all that important. The difficulty here cannot be explained away by the numerous offices on a printed ticket. These men were voting for only a single man to fill Connell's seat. Rather, it suggests that these voters were voting either on blind party faith, or that they were voting the way someone had told (and perhaps paid) them to vote.<sup>9</sup>

For the purposes of the senate inquiry, however, voter recall was not essential to tracking the number of votes cast for each candidate. The committee also had on hand party workers, who were well able to testify the extent of their party's support at the poll.<sup>10</sup> This indicates another feature of the era's vote, the near total lack of privacy about the voter's choice. Election Day practices made it relatively easy for observers to know how a citizen had voted. Prior to the state-printed Australian style ballot, political parties had printed their own slates. Each ballot would have the names of a single set of candidates: the party's nominees. In order to vote, a voter had to find a ticket captain or hawker, usually identified by a badge or sign on his body. The tickets themselves would also generally have some sort of identification, either by color, symbol—an eagle or a flag, for example—or simply the party's name.<sup>11</sup> The common practice was for the voter to walk up to the captain in the area immediately in front of the polling booth, obtain a ticket, and then walk to the window to vote.<sup>12</sup> Since the ward committee might have two or three representatives at the booth—a ticket hawker, a window observer, and perhaps also a person behind the window to keep

watch on the voting process—the voter could easily be tracked from the moment he picked up the ticket until he deposited it. This method of identification helped party workers track the votes up to the moment when they were deposited in the ballot box. It also greatly aided fraudulent practices such as bribery, since the party captain could be almost certain that any voter paid for his vote had in fact voted the correct way. Registration books at the polling booth were marked when each man voted, so the choice of slate could be further matched with a specific name. The vote, in short, was a public declaration of a voter's loyalties. Papers would even occasionally announce the choices of individual voters in their pages.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, this method of ticket distribution allowed for the other party to play tricks on the unwary voter. On Election Day, newspapers often warned their partisan readers to carefully examine their tickets, since the opposition was about the town passing off Democratic tickets marked as Republican, or vice versa. Republican circulars landing on people's doorsteps the night before the vote actually contained a largely Democratic slate, the *Inquirer* warned.<sup>14</sup> Other rumors floated by the press had it that certain tickets contained only some of the party's candidates, usually those at the top of the ticket, with candidates from the other side listed below that.<sup>15</sup> One 1880 story described ballots with oiled paper covering the true slate of names with a different slate. Wet, a Republican slate would show on the ballot, and so be delivered unsuspectingly into the ballot box by loyal Republican voters. Dry, the oil paper would fall off the ballot, to reveal a different, opposition slate, which would be the one counted.<sup>16</sup>

Granted that the story may be more colorful than plausible, it was nevertheless the case generally that these sorts of tricks were just one of a number of scheduling puzzles that the organization needed to solve on Election Day. Whatever one might think of the political implications of the late nineteenth century Election Day, its *technical* achievement is impressive. Getting the right ballot to the right voters, and making certain that they put that ballot in the box, required a great deal of hard work and intellectual acumen.<sup>17</sup> The local Philadelphia politician needed to keep track of how and where tickets were being distributed, keep an ear to the ground about rumors of deals that ward or division leaders might have cut with another faction or a member of the opposition, worry about a candidate on the regular slate being “knifed” (ie., keeping the name of a regularly nominated candidate out of the ticket), or of the opposition efforts to keep one’s own partisan away from the polls.<sup>18</sup> The party ticket placed a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of the political workers. What it demanded of the voter was something different—loyalty and acknowledgement of the political hierarchy’s general reliability in terms of guidance on such matters. This was not at all the message that the Machine’s opponents wished Election Day to send to the public.

#### The alternative model: the mugwump’s independent voter

An alternative performance to the loyal machine voter was provided by the so-called “vest-pocket” or “independent” voters. These were men who brought their own tickets to the election ground, or took party tickets back to their homes and offices and



examined them carefully before bringing them back out to the grounds and voting. Sometimes they would even alter the names on the ticket, in order to vote for someone other than the party candidate, by “scratching” a name off the ballot and writing-in one of their own choosing, or by “splitting” their ticket, that is, combining tickets, and names, from two different parties in order to form their own slate.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of numbers, the independent voter was probably not very important for most of this period; he almost certainly was not as much of a concern for the ward captain as, say, getting the tickets printed and out to the polling booths the morning of Election Day.<sup>20</sup> All the same, he had a high public profile, since he was a hero to the reforming journalists and the “mugwumps” who wanted to overthrow the rings and party bosses: the defender of liberty, reason, and democracy. “The independent voters are composed of those who do their own thinking, who read the newspapers thoughtfully,” wrote *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.<sup>21</sup> Independent voters did the most effective work of the campaign by appreciating the full value of citizenship, by attending to issues rather than carrying torches and attending mass meetings. They could always be depended upon to head to the polls early and then go about their business calmly. They had the courage of their convictions. (*The Inquirer* also added that of course, in 1880, all independent voters were Republicans, because they knew that the policies of the Democratic party would lead Pennsylvania and the country into ruin.)<sup>22</sup>

The independent voter was, in short, very much of the class that the reforming editors and writers of the urban press probably imagined themselves to be. This group

of men was led by East Coast intellectuals like E.L. Godkin, Carl Shurz, and Horace Greeley.<sup>23</sup> Although many, like Greeley, had been instrumental in the founding of the Republican party in the 1850s, they became increasingly disenchanted with that party as the Grant administration dropped even deeper into corruption, and dismayed at the prominent role played by political pragmatists like James G. Blaine and Chester Arthur.<sup>24</sup> In 1872, many of these “mugwumps” supported Greeley’s presidential run under the Independent Republican banner. Their Republican loyalties in general were suspect; they tended to favor reformist Democrats like Samuel Tilden over their party’s own candidates. Reform candidates often came from the same backgrounds as the mugwumps themselves, upper or upper-middle class families, Ivy League colleges or other prestigious colleges and universities. They were men educated to be leaders, socialized in the assumption that they had both the right and the duty to guide the country.<sup>25</sup> It was a right and duty that the urban machines had largely taken away from them. Prior to the 1840s, nearly all of Philadelphia’s mayors had come from the economic and social elite of the city; after that time, almost none of them did. Men like Stokely, Fox, and McManes were fighters up from the street. They had little time for the aristocratic ideals of the reformers.<sup>26</sup>

Like earlier critics of Election Day, the mugwumps were often dismayed over democracy as it actually fell out on the day of the vote. They decried the pervasive corruption and voting fraud.<sup>27</sup> They were suspicious of the more spectacular forms of party activity like parades or marching bands.<sup>28</sup> They also felt that the quality of the performers themselves was highly unsatisfactory, arguing that many voters were

simply too ignorant or too morally debased to be relied upon to treat the vote with the respect it deserved.<sup>29</sup> Immigrants in particular were suspect. “This country never committed a more fatal mistake than in making its naturalization laws so that the immense immigration from foreign countries could, after a brief sojourn, exercise the right of suffrage,” wrote author J.T. Headley:

To ask men, the greater part of whom could neither read nor write, who were ignorant of the first principles of true civil liberty, who could be bought and could like sheep in the shambles, to assist us in founding a model republic, was a folly without parallel in the history of the world, and one of which we have not yet begun to pay the full penalty.<sup>30</sup>

As a solution to the problem of uneducated or unprepared voters, reformers suggested a whole host of new restrictions to keep these men from the polls, including longer residency requirements (some suggested a residency in the United States of 20 years) and literacy tests. The latter were one of the main tools by which Southern Democrats kept Negro voters from the polls. In Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, however, the more important source of disenfranchisement of voters was residency requirements.<sup>31</sup>

The issue was, in part, a continuation of a problem that had dogged Election Day almost from the birth of Republic. Americans continually struggled among themselves over how voters ought to behave at the polls—whether they should vote on the basis of partisan passions, or act independently of outside influences. If the mugwumps’ independent voter—sober, intelligent, civic-minded, disinterested—was the ancestor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s rational, informed citizen, he was also a descendent of the antiparty man of the federalist era, or the responsible democrat lauded by the *Public Ledger* in the 1830s. There had always been a tension in the popular political

culture about what exactly the voter owed to the group—the party, or the tribe that he belonged to—and what he owed his own conscience. The independent voter was yet another instance of this, and the confusion surrounding him in the pages of a partisan paper like the *Inquirer* or the *North American*—independent voters did not listen to the siren call of party, yet were all Republicans—was symptomatic of that larger struggle.

What is perhaps most instructive about the confusion over the independent voter, the confusion over party, was that even the rings and the bosses used anti-party rhetoric at times. Because of the resonance the image of the independent voter had in the political culture, it was helpful for any and everyone to put themselves forward as the party of the independent man. So that readers of the Election Day edition of the Republican-dominated *Inquirer* in 1896 would have seen a large cartoon of an anguished-looking William Penn, pointing to the liberty and swearing to voters that “No Boss shall rule this town!” Front page stories surrounding the cartoon attacked David Martin, a well-known Republican politician and wire-puller, and trumpeted a reformist movement within the Republican party that was running slate opposed to Martin’s candidate for sheriff.<sup>32</sup> On an inside page, the paper printed a full-scale replica of the ticket that city voters would see that day, and instructions on how to vote the “Citizen’s For McKinley” ticket, rather than the regular Republican ticket. Although the paper contained some attacks on its traditional enemies, the Democrats, the fight, at least as waged in the media, was largely overshadowed by the assault on rings and bosses.<sup>33</sup>

It is not surprising that reformers would be running a candidate against someone like Martin, a long-time party hack. This they did regularly during the late 1800s and early 1900s, generally with little or no success.<sup>34</sup> The strange piece of the whole affair is that the leader of the movement in this case would have been someone like Israel Durham, a classic machine boss in the William Plunkett mode who once cracked, when asked about the outcome of a Presidential election, “what do I care, as long as I carry my ward?”<sup>35</sup> Durham’s efforts in this instance were taken less on behalf of reform than at the request of Matthew Quay, the powerful boss of the state party who had obtained the nickname “kingmaker” for his role in electing presidents in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Quay had become suspicious of Martin’s growing independence from state party control. When Martin decided to run his own candidates through in the 1896 primaries, the Boss had ordered loyal lieutenants like Durham to mount an opposing campaign. Durham’s efforts were successful, Martin was crushed, and Quay would no longer have to fear revolts in the city ranks. The near-complete control of the city by the Republican machine in fact probably started from this “reformist” victory.<sup>36</sup>

Something more than simple hypocrisy was going on in the *Inquirer’s* call for reform. Whatever the motivation may have been, its attacks on party and political hierarchy had an evident resonance in the culture. Political reform was in the air—the machine’s decision to use the reformer’s rhetoric for its purpose was evidence that it understood that. In the case of Philadelphia city politics, the Durham organization was able to use the image of the honest, independent electorate overturning the boss to

establish its control. But in so doing, it simply continued an ongoing process, begun by the mugwumps, of reconfiguring Election Day. These two groups, machine politicians and reformers, would continue to battle for control over the meaning of the Election Day performance. The question is, why exactly was the control of the population such an important issue? The answer to that lies not in the behavior or motivations of the political elite, but in the performance of the public itself.

#### The Election Day performers: the battle for the public

On October 10, 1871, the date of Philadelphia's General Election, in the late afternoon, prominent city merchant Samuel P. Wanamaker saw a man he later identified as Octavius V. Catto step off the sidewalk and begin running down the 800 block of South Street, as another man ran after him, firing a pistol at his back.<sup>37</sup> That Wanamaker would have recognized the 33-year-old black educator is not surprising. The two probably knew each other through their mutual political interests—both were prominent members of the Republican Party. Or Wanamaker may have recognized the younger man simply by notoriety alone. Catto had already made a name for himself in the city as politician, civil rights activist, and athlete. He was the prime mover behind a city-wide boycott in the late 1860s protesting the treatment of colored citizens in Philadelphia's public transportation system, and the first black man to become a member of the Franklin Institute, a group of eminent scientists and other intellectuals in Philadelphia.<sup>38</sup>

This afternoon, however, Catto was in the sort of trouble for which his civic reputation was of not much use. The assailant's first shot missed; he fired twice more. Catto whirled around, mortally wounded, and threw up his hands. Wanamaker, watching the whole scene from a cable car, jumped to the street and yelled out for someone to stop the shooter, who ran back into the crowd, up South, onto Ninth Street, and then went into a tavern at Ninth and Bainbridge. Tavern patrons noted the murderer running out through the bar and disappearing into a back yard. Later it would be reported that two city policemen conveniently left the tavern at about the same time that the shooter ran into it, failing to arrest or even stop the man.<sup>39</sup>

Octavius Catto was the most prestigious victim of Election Day, 1871, but not the only one. Earlier in the day, another Negro, Isaac Chase, was knocked down during a melee and his head crushed with a hatchet. A third died from injuries sustained during a police beating, the result of a political dispute, the Sunday before. Another may have been killed during a huge riot in the Fifth Ward between whites and blacks that took place, on and off, for most of the day.<sup>40</sup> There were other incidents. Daniel Redding, a First Ward voter who objected to some irregularities in that ward, was set upon by a gang of ruffians, beaten with a blackjack and cut with a knife. A reporter for the *Philadelphia Press* was badly beaten and left in the street, and at least two young boys suffered serious injuries. James Nixon, 14, was shot in the back on Election evening. Frank Cannon, 10, was shot in the neck. Both boys were hurt while making bonfires in the street.<sup>41</sup> The day after the election, a Democratic election inspector was killed, purportedly for his work at the polls. Even by the standards of

nineteenth century political culture, the 1871 Election was a remarkably dangerous one.<sup>42</sup>

Tensions between black and white mobs had been stoked that morning when black voters accused the police and election officials of forcing them to give up their places in the voting lines to whites.<sup>43</sup> An appearance by the mayor and an influx of police calmed things for a time, but almost immediately after the mayor left the scene beatings started. Stories began to circulate among the black community about police clubbing Negro voters; an Election Day judge issued a warrant for the arrest of one officer, Lieutenant Haggerty. By late morning, the mixture of liquor, excited crowds, rumors of black men being shot at the polls, and imported white toughs from other city wards, ignited a full-scale riot.<sup>44</sup> A report from *The Inquirer* gives a flavor of the scene:

The policemen, in their efforts to make arrests, fell out of line and became mixed up with the populace, while white and black were jammed in together pell-mell and a free fight raged fiercely for the distance of a square. The house tops were crowded and from many of these on St. Mary street brickbats came crushing down on the heads of the multitude. In the streets paving stones and brickbats were flying in all directions and from some of the houses occasionally a stray bullet would come...A gloomy sullen spirit of hatred seemed to animate the participants, and each echoing pistol shot only increased the Nemesis-like fury that animated the vast throng.

By the time police had settled the crowd down several hours later, the reporter wrote, "men might be seen in all directions with bandaged heads and bullet-torn clothing, seeking refuge in homes and narrow alleys." About forty men were admitted to nearby Pennsylvania Hospital as a result of the riot.<sup>45</sup>



Philadelphia's politicians had been expecting some level of violence. This was only the second time in the city's history that large numbers of Negroes had gone to the polls. The year before, in 1870, black voters had caught white citizens somewhat off-guard, lining up at the polls at four in the morning and voting early, thereby mostly avoiding flying bricks, or so-called "Irish Confetti," and escaping largely without injury.<sup>46</sup> But the 1871 election was a more important occasion, as both mayor and city council would be re-elected. Democratic forces, led by Mayor Daniel Fox, had been gearing up for the battle for some time. Black voters could be expected to overwhelmingly support Fox's Republican opposition, and the mayor set in motion everything at his disposal, including the city's police force, to limit the effectiveness of blacks, and Republicans generally, at the polls.<sup>47</sup>

As in the antebellum era, the literary vitriol, the accusations of manipulation, bribery, physical intimidation, and outright theft of the election fit easily with the physical violence and brutality found in many Philadelphia elections. Some examples: in the state elections of 1864, a group of celebrating soldiers and Republican partisans passed by a saloon, singing "Honest old Abe." A shot from the bar wounded two children; in response the crowd proceeded to tear apart the building.<sup>48</sup> In 1872, a fight between whites and blacks in the Seventh Ward required the calling in of troops. The October Election Day of 1868 alone saw the deaths of six men. By 1899, Israel Loat attempted to defend himself from a charge of stabbing by claiming that "it was only an election fight." It was a reasonable (but ultimately unsuccessful) defense.<sup>49</sup>

The dividing line between street-level gangs and political groups was often difficult to discern in 19<sup>th</sup> century Philadelphia. Gangs, fire companies—the city’s fire fighting efforts were privatized for much of the century—religious groups and political parties, often linked through informal or semi-formal channels, met and fought in the street on Election Days. James McManes, boss of the infamous “Gas Ring,” had been in a gang as a young man. Two other important politicians in Philadelphia’s post-war scene, Mayor William Stokely and William “Squire” McMullen, the Democratic dictator of the city’s working-class Fourth Ward, had been members of fire-hose companies, which were often affiliated to gangs or essentially gangs themselves. McMullen’s political reputation in fact grew out of the respect he had garnered as a young thug, and he was implicated in several murders of Nativist partisans prior to achieving fame as a war hero.<sup>50</sup> Men like these used their ties to these local groups to develop a base of political support that they then transferred into broader political power, but that power depended on the a willingness to use violence, and a skilled knowledge of when and where to apply it.

A great deal of what drove the street battles, as always, was the whole raft of social divisions that were part and parcel of American society in the nineteenth century, and which politicians played upon for pragmatic electoral ends. The Civil War, while fought for the union of the country, did not in the slightest change this aspect of Election Day. If anything, fights over who got included and who got left out of the political equation were more serious now, and more complicated. In 1870, the United States Congress adopted the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution. The

amendment, which was primarily directed toward black American voters, had a greater effect on voting in the northern states, many of whom continued to restrict the franchise to white males, than the southern states. The latter had already been required, under the terms of the surrender, to give black males the right to vote. Pennsylvania was thus one of the last states in the union to allow blacks to legally go to the polls on Election Day. This change added one more participant in the Election Day battle over identity.<sup>51</sup>

*The Age*, one of the main Democratic newspapers in the city, called the ballot the freeman's "distinctive badge of citizenship," adding that it was "political cowardice not to vote. It is a crime against the state, the nation."<sup>52</sup> Election Day battles were battles about who would count. Religion, class, political affiliation, and now race: all of these elements of public identity were used as markers for Election Day performers. The Republican Party, the party of abolitionism and equal rights, would be the party of black America for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>, just as the Democracy was the party of the white working man.<sup>53</sup> Throughout this period, Republican papers like the *Inquirer* would use Democrats' racism to drum up support for Republicans at the polls.<sup>54</sup> But blacks, like the rest of the political body, looked to the Republicans for more than moral reaffirmation. In an age in which partisan politics, even more than today, were the key to jobs and business contracts, blacks voters expected to receive some tangible benefit from their loyalty.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, like the rest of the northern Negro population, black Philadelphia—with the possible exception of the ward leaders of black districts—generally received

little to show for its loyalty on Election Day.<sup>56</sup> Black Philadelphians could not even depend on city hall to protect the right of black suffrage. They had to fight in the streets of the city on Election Day to protect their status of citizenship, since by and large they could not expect help from the police or the sheriff when white voters attempted to keep them from the polls. Tensions were especially high in and around poorer white districts like McMullen's Fourth Ward, often known as the "bloody Fourth," and the neighboring, largely black, Seventh Ward. Competing for jobs and living space, working class whites and blacks needed very little to set them off on Election Day.<sup>57</sup>

The United States was then, as it is now, a country in which race—increasingly defined as skin color—constituted a major social fault line. The celebration of politics in that society consequently highlighted the division. But blacks were not the only group whose role on Election Day was problematic during this period. In Republican Philadelphia, Democrats often found their citizenship questioned by popular newspapers like *The North American* or *The Inquirer*. The Democracy's prewar sympathy toward slavery and the South generally led to constant accusations of treason on and about Election Day. In its 1864 call for Republicans to come out to the polls, *The Inquirer* urged them to "VINDICATE THE WAR DEAD." The blood of brothers and sons now in their graves would cry out in anguish if the Republicans were to fail. "This is the great battle day between the adherents of liberty and the apologizers and sympathizers with treason," the paper charged.<sup>58</sup> *The North American* compared voters to knights, called upon voters to "do something for the cause."<sup>59</sup> The

day after the election, newspapers trumpeted **“VICTORY! THE UNION TRIUMPHANT!! The Northern Rebels Sent Whirling.”** The Election was one in a list of, by now, constant Union successes on the battlefields of the nation.<sup>60</sup>

Lincoln’s assassination gave even more ideological fuel for the Democrats’ opponents. Republicans would continue to wave the “bloody shirt” on Election Day for the next 25 years. Democratic politicians consisted of rebel generals, Republicans argued, and loyal Americans would make certain that the “great Republican party which saved the country in war is to control it in peace.”<sup>61</sup> In 1888, a GOP party chairman was quoted on Election Day saying that what Lincoln, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, and Harrison fought for, “we contest and struggle for today.”<sup>62</sup> That same year, a poem on “New York City’s Elect” (ie., Tammany Hall) stressed the racism of northern Democrats and alluded to the time when “darkies from lamp posts were strung by a halter.”<sup>63</sup> Especially damning to Republicans was the constant support of the rebel “solid south” on Election Day. The perverse refusal of southerners to accept defeat, and to continue in their wicked, racist, and treasonous attitudes, was simply more evidence of Democratic perfidy and its essential anti-Americanism. The truth was confirmed every four years for Philadelphians when returns recreated the map of the political nation, with the South, again and again, solid for the Democrats.<sup>64</sup> References to rebellion and treason only fell away with Bryan’s campaigns, when Republicans began to harp on Democrats’ appeal to class hatreds and the presidential candidate’s anarchism for their rhetorical appeals.<sup>65</sup>

Of course, attacks on the opposition did not only come from one side. Battle imagery, always an element of Election Day rhetoric, was especially popular in electoral politics after the bitterness engendered by the Civil War. Mass media from both major parties hyped political contests. If Democrats were rebels, then Republicans, in the words of a Democratic paper like *The Age*, were despots, cheaters, and Know Nothing bigots. On Election Day, 1868, *The Age* called on all white freeman to come to the aid of the country. It headlined the attempted arrest of a city Democrat the day before the election as an “attempted kidnapping.”<sup>66</sup> Following Republican successes at the polls, the same paper announced the “TRIUMPH OF FRAUD,” the victory of bribery and federal patronage.<sup>67</sup> At least around Election Day, the word “republican” was rarely found in the pages of *The Age*. Instead, the other side was referred to as the “Radicals,” no doubt to align Philadelphia’s professional, conservative political class with the ideological puritanism of the Radical Republicans.<sup>68</sup>

Often, the best way to channel partisan vitriol was through the use of ethnic parody and stereotype. Generally, the targets of these attacks were those whose membership in the nation was somehow in question. One of the favorite rhetorical devices of the Republican press, as it had been for Whigs 30 years earlier, was the stupid, drunken, dirty, mean-spirited and brutal Irishman, eager to sell his vote for a glass of beer or whiskey.<sup>69</sup> Democrats went after blacks. On the Presidential Election Day, 1860, Democratic partisans paraded a young man on a pole dressed to look like

an ape in a suit, according to newspaper accounts. Some observers laughed, some threw mud and other missiles. Eventually a fight erupted over the burlesque.<sup>70</sup>

At that same time that these racial, class, and sectional battles were being fought, both on the streets and in print, a new challenge to the identity of the Election Day public was being raised. On the same day that Octavius Catto died, Carrie S. Burnham and her lawyer, Damon Killgore, appeared at a Broad Street polling booth. As the vehicle drew up to the curb, the crowd of men gathered around the window parted in order to allow Burnham access to the polls.

“Here is my vote, sir,” the suffragette said, and then handed a ticket (“pretty well scratched,” according to the reporter) to the election judge, who refused to take it.

“Why not, sir?” snapped Burnham. “I am a citizen. I pay taxes. I am governed, and I have a right to vote.” After a few more words, and a sheaf of papers produced by Killgore which went quite ignored, the two reformers headed off to the election court. There the lawyer and the suffragette continued to argue the case. The court refused to overturn the poll judge’s decision, adding that the proper recourse in the case of a legal vote being refused was to launch a prosecution against the election officers.<sup>71</sup>

The suffragettes’ Election Day performances relied on rhetoric and a confident manner. Not all were able to pull it off with the aplomb of Burnham. For example, an *Inquirer* story on the 1888 Election Day told of a neatly attired middle-aged woman who had wandered up to one of the polls in the city, intending to vote for the suffrage candidate, Belva Lockwood.

She started bravely enough, but when she approached the window her modesty got the better of her intentions. While the window book men had no intention

of allowing the vote to go in they were gallant enough to inquire her name, residence, and age. She started to answer, then paused, then blushed, and the next moment turned on her heel and walked away as fast as she had come without casting her vote for Mrs. Lockwood.<sup>72</sup>

The rough and ready Election Day of the post-Civil War era, like politics of the age generally, was taken to be a man's world. When the suffragette demand's for the vote could not be ignored, they were patronized. Writers in *The Inquirer* argued that the fairer sex's natural inclinations were enough to insure that the debate over women's role in Election Day would never be raised in earnest.<sup>73</sup> By the turn of the century, however, women were increasingly appearing in Election Day celebrations. Once the new century started, stories appeared the members of the political party's women's auxiliary preparing meals for the poll watchers and Election Day workers.<sup>74</sup> Unlike the revolution of black America's presence at the polls, women's claim on Election Day was an evolving state. First came an increased public appearance, and then, only gradually, greater participation. By the 1910s, women were advocating more directly for a greater political voice, handing out "suffragette" tickets to voters on their way to polling stations.<sup>75</sup>

Blacks, women, the Irish, the emigrants, southerners: the picture of the nation that was celebrated quadrennially on the first Tuesday in November was far more inchoate than political organizers or reformers probably would have hoped. Images of cohesion and consensus symbolized in the person of the successful candidate were constantly being undercut by fights among various groups of malcontents. Election Day was a struggle to somehow fit those pieces of the nation into a clear and satisfying picture, coherent and harmonious. That some of the groups did not



necessarily want coherence and harmony, at least not on the terms of the managers of the Election Day celebration, was a continual source of tension.

**Election Day traditions:**

Battles at the polls and on the street were one way that Philadelphians fought out the image of the public that the Gilded Age election presented before them. That was not a feature unique to Election Day. Riots were a part of nineteenth century life generally. The day did have a number of more distinctive traditions, however, through which the city's residents understood the tensions inherent in the day. Two of the most important were the Election night bonfire, and the outlandish bet.

Although the Election night fire had a history going back to the late 1790s or early 1800s, the specific practice of boys creating bonfires at street intersections throughout the city, however, was somewhat more recent. Alexander Cummings first noted the practice on the night of the 1852 Presidential Election, that is, the first Election Day held away from the State House.<sup>76</sup> From that moment on, the building of bonfires seems to have been taken as both a sort of duty and a right on the part of the younger residents of the city.<sup>77</sup> The fires were obviously dangerous: almost every Election Day round-up would include a story of some child being seriously wounded in a fire, and the city outlawed the practice in the 1880s.<sup>78</sup> They were also destructive. For weeks before Election Day, city merchants needed to keep a watchful eye on any piece of property that could possibly be taken as kindling. The brazenness of these young pyromaniacs was impressive; on Election Day itself they were not above

stealing wood openly from merchants if their stores of fuel fell too low.<sup>79</sup> However the bonfires were rarely the subject of approbation among the adults. Newspapers rather spoke of the majestic sight of the city lit up on the night of election, stoked by young “patriots.” The bonfires seemed to have been taken as a sort of training ground for future voters and democratic citizens.<sup>80</sup>

The activity of the bonfire could take on an almost tribal feel, and injuries came about as a result not only of accidents but deliberate intent. One year, a seven year-old boy was stabbed and a 13 year-old shot following two separate fights around bonfires in different parts of the city (amazingly enough, both fights were reported to have sprung from political arguments, which suggests just how deep political feeling extended into the population at the time.)<sup>81</sup>

Bonfires were not the only instance where younger Philadelphians played provocateur. It was boys who generally passed out the Salt Water Tickets the day after the vote, or had a joke at the loser’s expense. In 1888, a group of young girls sashayed down the streets of Frankfort mocking Democrats in song: “Cleveland’s dead/Thurman’s dying/Harrison’s elected/And there’s no use crying.”<sup>82</sup> Following Blaine’s defeat four years earlier, boys had hung out the windows of the Democratic Americus club tearing up strips of paper and yelling “burn this letter,” in reference to an embarrassing instance of corruption that helped doom the Republican’s chances. This in turn provoked a fight between bitter Republicans and gleeful Democrats, and in fact younger men and teenage boys were often involved in instigating Election Day rows.<sup>83</sup> Betwixt and between—not quite citizen, not quite non-citizen—teenagers

were the Election Day tricksters. As they danced around the bonfire, celebrating the day but not fully in it, barely under control, teenage boys reminded their elders of the strange space they occupied on Election Day.

Betting on the outcome of the race was another custom that had a long history, and contributed to the Election Day spectacle (or rather, the day-after spectacle). Much of the horse-race style of reporting and manufactured polling, in fact, was produced for bettors on the Presidential and other races. Despite its popularity, or rather, because of it, the practice had always been a scourge in the eyes of independent journalists and other reformers. The main criticism raised against betting was that it encouraged an interest in individual welfare over the common good. More scandalous yet, it made this celebration *public*.<sup>84</sup>

And yet, once dependably an anathema, Election Day betting saw its public stature improve dramatically after the Civil War. Attitudes toward election betting grew increasingly lax in the age of civic graft and Wall Street scandals. Bets often appeared on the front pages of newspapers, especially in party papers like the *Inquirer*, in which proof the party's strength was supported by claims that the opposition was afraid to bet on their candidates.<sup>85</sup> The day before the 1880 Presidential poll, the paper printed that in New York bets of up to \$1,000 were being placed for Garfield; Philadelphia was seeing bets of \$100 to \$200. Throughout the 1880s, although the *Inquirer* was still printing an occasional anti-betting editorial, the pieces often focused on the foolishness of the bettors rather than any threat that betting presented to democracy itself.<sup>86</sup>

In an editorial about betting in 1892, the paper's editors wrote that the wagers were in many respects a compliment to the people, since they were a clear indication of the passion that Americans brought to their politics, and were a manful and public display of confidence in the candidate of one's choice. The editorial did admit, however, that sometimes the betting got out of hand, such as when men bet their family's house or their farm on the outcome of the race.<sup>87</sup> That year, featuring a close contest between President Cleveland and Republican challenger Harrison, was perhaps the watershed year for betting. One story reported that Israel Durham had challenged Democrat John Fow with a wager as high as \$20,000 on the race.<sup>88</sup> Another story reported that prominent Republican Judge Ahern of the city had placed two separate bets of \$10,000 each on the race.<sup>89</sup> In New York, the *Inquirer* reported, thousand dollar bills were as plentiful as pennies at the center of the betting, the Hoffman House hotel, and anything lower than a thousand was "sneered at." The reported claimed that \$175,000 had been bet in a single night at the hotel, and that representatives of Tammany had brought \$150,000 to the hotel to bet. Wagers became so widespread at the hotel that the manager closed it down to gamblers the next day.<sup>90</sup> One item on the election betting craze, which included a rumored \$100,000 bet, hinted that many of the public wagers were not true bets but made only for the purpose of creating public sentiment in favor of the bettor's champion. These bets were expressly for the media's consumption; neither side actually intended to pay the money off in the case of a loss.<sup>91</sup>

Monetary bets were only part of the betting culture that surrounded Election Day in the post-Civil War years. A more distinctive practice was that of making “novel,” “amusing,” or “outlandish” bets. These bets were paid off on the day after the election, and nearly always subjected the loser to public humiliation. A man who had bet on Bryan in 1900 was required to discourse on the ills of fusion politics from the roof of his house, dressed in flesh tights, for several hours. Another losing Democrat in the same year wrote the winning candidate’s name on all four corners of every intersection along Chestnut Street, from Broad to Front Streets in the middle of the city. Another was required to sit in a donkey-cart as the winner drew him through the street, preceded by a marching band and flag, and followed by four Democratic pallbearers.<sup>92</sup> In 1892, a bet made at the Colonnade Hotel required the loser to ride down Broad Street on a white horse, head turned toward the rear end, wearing a red, white and blue costume.<sup>93</sup> Many of the bets were variants on popular categories that reappeared year after year: the loser required to shave off half of his beard or all of his beard; the loser required to push a peanut down the street or around city with a ridiculous tool—a crowbar, a toothpick; the loser required to dress up as organ-grinder or the grinder’s monkey; the loser required to pull the winner along in a cart.<sup>94</sup> Yet another tradition seems to have been the buying of silk hats. Following the 1888 election, *The North American* reported a hatters shop on Chestnut street being inundated with orders.<sup>95</sup>

Outlandish betting allowed the Everyman, the member of the public not otherwise in the public eye, to figure as a notable member of the Election Day

celebration. In 1892, two employees of the Continental Hotel, a Turk named Gallagher in charge of the wine room, and a colored bathroom attendant named Anderson, made an Election Day bet; the loser would have to carry the winner around on his back.<sup>96</sup> These ridiculous bets overturned the world of American politics, the world that had heretofore dominated the election. One report noted the unusual site of a white man, who had supported the losing Democrat, carrying a winning black Republican ward boss around city streets.<sup>97</sup> Rich men—generally in the pages of the *Inquirer*, rich Democrats—were forced to parade down the street in ridiculous attire as the democratic public jeered and asked them, “how do you like it?”<sup>98</sup> The night before the 1888 Presidential vote, a Democrat named Francis Barker met a Republican acquaintance in the street and wagered his moustache and three front teeth that Cleveland would take the race. When he did not, the partisan *North American* gleefully recounted Barker’s trip first to the dentist, where he exited with blood streaming from his mouth, and then the visit to the barber.<sup>99</sup>

Election Day bets confounded instead of enunciating social categories. They were a popular cultural form in which the members of the city tried to come to grips with the event of the election ritual. The outlandish bet mocked the passions that the election contest had stirred, made it easier for Republicans and Democrats to go back to their normal lives. Similarly, the election night fires were a popular metaphor of the state of the public mind on Election night. These popular forms of the Election Day ritual signaled the extent to which Philadelphian’s had become agitated by the social contest in their midst. Once the popular excitement in the campaign disappeared, as it

would, these forms would disappear as well. There was no longer anything for them to do.

The Election night spectacular:

Another Election Day tradition, much newer than the bet or the bonfire, but like them a partial response to the tensions embodied on Election Day, was the creation of a spectacle of the Election night return. Crowds of thousands would block the major thoroughfares of the city—Market Street, Broad, Chestnut Street—as they waited for returns from the city and the rest of the country. After the Civil War, the important political clubs like the Union Republican club or the Democratic Amicus club entertained the political faithful with fireworks and marching bands in between the returns. Large white sheets would be tacked up on a neighboring wall, and a magic lantern or “stereopticon” would throw up returns on to the wall.<sup>100</sup>

Eventually, responsibility for the returns became increasingly identified with the city’s major newspapers, which would compete with one another for the fastest results, and the largest crowds. The role of the newspaper in providing the Election night spectacle is related to other changes that were occurring in the culture of the late nineteenth century press. Three important arguments, raised by earlier historians of the nineteenth century press, are relevant here. The first is the shift in function of the newspaper, from a political to a commercial orientation.<sup>101</sup> In Philadelphia most papers were still nominally partisan. However, that partisan loyalty became, increasingly simply one aspect of the newspaper’s character. The more central

function, now, was simply to make a profit through advertising.<sup>102</sup> Populist forms of communication—the illustrated magazine, the cartoon, made journalism more immediately appealing and more widely available. In addition, the growing importance of commercial concerns entailed a style of self-promotion. In order to garner advertising revenue, and readers, newspapers lit on a whole host of public events to raise their profile.<sup>103</sup> One of these events seems to have been the Election night spectacular. The greater the crowds, the more elaborate the show, the more effective Election night served as a public demonstration of the newspaper's popularity among the city's public. Thus, reports of Election Day in this period often feature extensive coverage of the crowds in front of the newspaper's own building, and claims of tens of thousands of spectators crowding the streets. The day after one election the *Inquirer* claimed that 30,000 people had waited in front of the paper's building to wait for returns, and that Market Street had been almost completely shut down to traffic for two city blocks.<sup>104</sup>

The crowd would groan or cheer with each new set of numbers, depending on whether they exceeded or fell short of the expected result. Political knowledge of issues and even candidates may not have been excessive among the Election night crowds of the Gilded Age, but they knew their strategy as well as any 20<sup>th</sup> century audience knows its football lore or celebrity gossip. That Democrats would take New York City was to be expected; the important point was by how much the majority would be, and whether it could withstand the likely Republican strength upstate. Republican strongholds in New England and the results of the Democratic south could



be largely ignored: they were a forgone conclusion. It was the so-called battleground states, places like Indiana, New York, and Ohio, that would make the day or lose it. Often, a Republican victory in New York was enough for the Republicans to pronounce a national victory, at which point the Union Club would traditionally erupt in roman candles and fireworks and fire its cannons from the atop its headquarters. The year of Garfield's Presidential win, the club lit up the word "Victory" on gas jets above the crowd. Once the election of its champion could be assured, Republican Philadelphia would explode in cheers and enact a general revelry.<sup>105</sup>

As with all other public events in the 1890s, newspapers used the occasion of Election Day for self-promotion. By the 1896 campaign, the *Inquirer* was printing front-page stories the day of the election, trumpeting the special features of its Election night presentation, describing how it would send up balloon signals once the success of candidates were known.<sup>106</sup> Its competitor, *The Press*, used its 1896 Election Day edition to announce fireworks above City Hall; Golden lights would mean a McKinley victory, red lights a Bryan win. Other colors would let the observer know how the local race for sheriff was going.<sup>107</sup>

The center of political life, at least as the media presented it, was moving from the political organization to the news outlet. The Union Club still gave the crowds returns, and its members still made the traditional march down Broad Street once a Republican victory was assured, but more and more it began to give way, as the site of public celebration, to the newspapers. The clubs generally appealed to partisans, but the daily journals made their shows appealing to all citizens.

Although partisan sheets, papers like *The Inquirer* and *The Press* harped on the non-ideological aspects of their superiority. Even Democrats and reformers knew that the *Inquirer* was the first and best with information, and had the most elaborate shows.<sup>108</sup> Papers outlined a national network of operators and reporters sending information from all corners of the country to the central office on Market street, which were then relayed to the crowds waiting outside, either via the stereopticon or extra editions.<sup>109</sup> Its public celebrations played on national symbols, a general national image of welfare and prosperity, free from class and sectional divisions. The day after McKinley's first presidential victory, the paper released fifty red, white and blue balloons in the air. No distinction was made among the states. Alabama and Arkansas, solid for Bryant, came directly after loyally Republican Pennsylvania and New York, Mississippi and Montana after Massachusetts: miraculously, and notwithstanding "that the wind was blowing a gale on the top of the Inquirer Building, not a single balloon was damaged as it shot up in the air."<sup>110</sup>

What allowed the Election night spectacle to occur at all was a change in the length of the vote count. Increasingly, the results of the vote were crowded into a single night. By mid-century, news of the election of President often came only hours after the polls had closed or within several days of the vote. There was still the occasional exception to this—notably the 1876 race, in which Hayes was not declared victor until almost a month after Election Day. As a general rule, however, the time between the taking of the vote and the announcement of the victor dramatically shrank during the course of the century. Voters in 1800 did not know that Thomas Jefferson

would be the country's next President until well in the New Year. By the 1830s or 1840s, the country's choice for Chief Executive Officer was generally pretty firmly established within days of the poll. In the late 1890s, announcement of the winner came by 10 or 11 o'clock in the evening.<sup>111</sup> No longer a local celebration of the vote, Election night increasingly became a celebration of the national results.

Notably, the centers that drew the largest crowds—political headquarters and newspapers—were those with access to a telegraph machine. On Election Day, the telegraph changed the way that voters in cities like Philadelphia experienced the Presidential vote. A major first step in changing the Election Day experience, as I have already noted, happened with the development of a national system of print journalism, which rearranged the symbolic space in which the vote took place. The telegraph returns made results from Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and St. Louis almost as near as Reading or Wilmington. Rather than a narrative of the nation, which unrolled over time and told a story of the city's relationship with the rest of the country, the new Election Day gave the crowds in the street a kind of national snap-shot. Readers were also given scorecards so that they could follow the returns on Election night and keep track of who was ahead. Newspapers ran contests that gave out cash prizes for the closest estimate of the national vote. By the 1890s, they would run electoral maps of the country, showing states strong for Bryan, those strong for McKinley, and the ones too close to call, allowing readers to take in at a glance the whole political identity of the United States—the solid Democratic south, the Republican Northeast, the Populist West.<sup>112</sup>

But the telescoping of Election Day—the growing ability of the date of the first Tuesday in November to encompass both the vote and its result—was a product of institutional changes as well as the changes in communication technology. Just as important as the introduction of the telegraph in telescoping the vote was the political decision, in 1848, to move the Presidential vote to a single day. The decision to create a single, national Election Day was based not on technological abilities, but political and social concerns. Its adoption originally was driven by a Cincinnati Congressman, Alexander “Bully” Duncan, who thought he lost the 1840 election to his Whig opponent because of the importation of voters from other Ohio cities and from across the border in Kentucky. Duncan imagined that by requiring all national offices to be voted for on the same day, this sort of corruption could be avoided.<sup>113</sup>

In a similar vein, although the telegraph undoubtedly allowed for a faster movement of polling returns across the country, its introduction would not in itself have led to the Election night pronouncements of victory that were customary at the end of the century. The development of specialized polling techniques meant that by the end of the Civil War, journalists had developed a system of focusing on bell weather precincts that tended to reflect the trends of larger relevant groups—rural voters, or urban Catholic voters, or working class voters. These were generally the returns that the journalists focused on to analyze who would take a city or state. Without the journalistic craft necessary to weed out important from unimportant returns, the announcements of victory would have taken far longer, modern technology or no.<sup>114</sup>

Once victory was decided, city crowds did not simply go home to celebrate. They stayed in the streets for hours, watching the spectacles put on for them by clubs and newspapers, making their own amusement—tin horns and toy drums were in easy supply on Election night, and reports made occasional note of the ill-sounding orchestras that were created—and marching.<sup>115</sup> As was the case before the revolution, political clubs from outlying districts and Wards would descend upon center of the city once the polls closed. Although they often bore a simple party name—the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward Republicans, the Young Democrats—other sources of identification were also used. The Republican Invincibles were linked to the memory of the Civil War, clubs like the Garfield and Hartranft clubs to national or state politicians. Sometimes these groups would be accompanied by a band, by red fire, or by flags and torches. Nearly always they carried some sort of transparency with the name of the Presidential candidate—in 1900, an Election night sign with McKinley’s name on it was so large partisans had trouble carrying it down broad street—or a sign celebrating victory—“Ohio-25,000 Republican majority.”<sup>116</sup>

Parades also led to fights between poor winners and poor losers. As always, the former were keen to goad the latter once victory could be assured, marching about with brooms in their hands or singing songs poking fun at the losing candidates. In 1896, police and supporters of the successful reform candidate for city sheriff got into an early morning, post-election battle after celebrating reformers started to mock the police, supposed tools of the Combine leaders.<sup>117</sup> In 1888, merchants closed their stores on the day after the election to avoid damage from battling crowds. Sometimes,

reform newspapers would refuse to hand out returns to Election night celebrants, for fear of stirring up violence, and at least one year, the mayor was forced to issue an order forbidding organizations from further marching in order to keep the peace.<sup>118</sup>

By the end of the period, however, Election night violence was becoming less central to the celebration of Election night returns. In its place, newspapers increasingly sought to provide the population with non-stop entertainment. While waiting for returns, crowds were offered cartoons and pictures of political figures on the screens. At mid-century, joyous partisans would sometimes walk up to a victorious candidate's house and serenade him; by the end of the century, it was the people who were being serenaded, as paid brass bands sat on a wooden stage in front of newspapers and played tunes for the assembled throng.<sup>119</sup>

The Election night spectacular provided a central space for the Election Day public to congregate, much like the polling booths at the State House had some years earlier. The decision to split up the voting experience into the ward system can be seen as a kind of attack on the Election Day celebration. Indeed, this is exactly how Alexander Cummings saw it. In 1852, he declared that an intelligent foreigner would not have been able to tell that an Election Day was taking place in the city.<sup>120</sup> Ironically, the very technologies that Cummings championed—the telegraph and the modern newspaper—were what helped keep the Election Day celebration from disappearing. The newspaper now provided not only the national narrative that linked Philadelphia's Election Day to the rest of the country, but it now provided as well the physical means by which the city's residents could assemble as a public. It took on

this role not out of any concern with public life, but because of commercial needs, and in response to a niche that needed to be filled—the desire for information about the result. The festive atmosphere was simply a by-product of the Election night’s purpose as advertising.

Thus, from an instrument used for partisan purposes, to divide the Election Day public, the newspaper’s role on Election Day was becoming one that served, increasingly, to bring the public together. Its returns brought the city itself together, and brought that public in touch with the wider national public that was performing Election Day. The partisan role of the newspaper did not entirely disappear. *The Press* and the *Inquirer* continued to attack their opponents on Election Day, to stress the need to vote, and to vote the straight ticket.<sup>121</sup> But they no longer played the central organizational role they once had. Gone from their pages were the locations where a voter would find a correct ballot, or the names to be written on the one’s own ticket. The organization had taken over these duties. The newspaper’s Election Day role, in other words, came to be increasingly involved in what happened after the vote, and in providing to the public an image of unity and entertainment, rather than division and battle. This changed the nature of the public that performed on Election Day, both in print and on the street, but even more dramatic changes were in the works.

#### Progressive reform and the Australian Ballot:

In the late 1800s, a number of reforms had been introduced in the civil service and in campaign practice that would radically change the context in which Election

Day took place. The main governmental reforms that are relevant to the changing context of Election Day were measures directed toward the professionalization of the civil service and the increasing centralization of government functions. With the growth of a large, professionally run administrative state, many government jobs were no longer tied directly to the outcome at the polls. This changed the stakes of Election Day, since it became more and more difficult for voters to directly influence their everyday lives via their voting behavior. To the extent that these reforms succeeded in their aims, voting, and Election Day more generally, became less a matter of concretely affecting one's own life, more a question of abstractly affecting the public good and the welfare of the county. It became a more theoretical, less immediately practical, activity.<sup>122</sup>

At the same time, political parties began to move away from what Michael McGerr has called the "spectacular" mode of electioneering—that is, campaigns that relied upon torch-light parades, marching bands, fireworks, and mass rallies—and toward a style of campaign that used mass print materials to persuade voters to support one or another candidate.<sup>123</sup> Simonson and Marvin argue that this resulted in a politics that discounted the role of the democratic crowd and bodily forms of communication, in favor of textual forms of communication—the newspaper, campaign propaganda. Electoral politics, and politics in general, became less a matter of popular participation and more a question of citizens being addressed by politicians and journalists. The citizen as participant was replaced with citizen as audience member. This had effects throughout the political sphere, including Election Day. It



made for a less popular Election Day, both in terms of style and in terms of the actual number of people participating.<sup>124</sup>

The progressive reform that probably most directly influenced Philadelphia's Election Day was the Australian ballot, so-called because it first made its appearance in the province of Tasmania in the 1860s.<sup>125</sup> This type of ballot was printed by the state and provided to voters at the polls. All eligible candidates are listed on a single ticket, and voters were required to fill the ballot out in secret—for example, behind a screen or canopy. In the United States, the Australian ballot was understood as a direct attack on political corruption and party machines. Bribery would become more difficult, for example, because the politician could no longer be certain that the voter would vote in the way that he had agreed to vote. Other forms of coercion—physical intimidation at the polls, as well as opportunities for religious leaders or employers to exert their own kinds of influence on voters—became similarly more difficult to enact on Election Day, it was argued.<sup>126</sup>

More than just a practical change, however, the Australian ballot also sent a moral message. It was a more “democratic” form of voting, a defense of the wisdom and opinions of the individual every man against the intrusions of social, economic and political hierarchies.<sup>127</sup> The Australian ballot did not, unlike previous forms of voting, either encourage or allow secrecy. It *enforced* the secret vote, whether the voter wished it to be secret or not. If the original form of the ballot in colonial Pennsylvania had some affinities with Dissenting attitudes toward the divine, then the Australian ballot was Protestant politics in even stricter form: a completely secret

relationship between the individual and the state, concerning the most important things, conducted in a space separated from the rest of the world.

Not everyone agreed that the Australian ballot was an advance in democratic politics. The liberal political theorist John Stuart Mill Mill argued against the ballot because he thought it would lead to a degeneration of the electorate:

[T]he *spirit* of an institution, the impression it makes on the mind of the citizen, is one of the most important parts of its operation. The spirit of vote by ballot—the interpretation likely to be put on it in the mind of the elector—is that suffrage is given to him for himself; for his particular use and benefit, and not as a trust for the public.<sup>128</sup>

Thus voters would begin to see the vote as a way to advance their own private interests, rather than understanding themselves to be acting on behalf of the common good. In fact, pursued to its logical conclusion, the idea of the vote as a private right implied that it was perfectly valid for the voter to sell the vote to the highest bidder.<sup>129</sup>

The problem that critics had was that a secret declaration of the voter's allegiance was an ignoble act. Since the citizen had obligations to other members of the community, it was correct that the members of this community should have some knowledge of how he acted. As for the idea that public pressure would unduly influence the voter, defenders of the public vote either discounted the problem or declared that any person who could be influenced by outside pressures ought not to be voting in the first place.<sup>130</sup>

Despite these objections, however, the appeal to political independence embodied by the secret ballot was simply too powerful for conservatives to stop it. The Australian ballot was first introduced into the United States in 1889, when

Kentucky—at the time the only state in the union still relying on the old viva voce method of voting—began using it for municipal elections in Louisville.<sup>131</sup> The same year, an act was passed in the Massachusetts State Assembly “to provide for printing and distributing ballots at the public expense.”<sup>132</sup> Most other states, including Pennsylvania, quickly followed suit. By 1910, only two states were not using some form of state-printed and distributed ballots.<sup>133</sup>

The ballot did seem to have some of the effects that reformers had intended. Bribery at the polls dropped dramatically, or at least, reports of bribery did.<sup>134</sup> The Australian ballot made any sort of *quid pro quo* much more difficult, although it did not erase it entirely. Occasionally, reports surface of a maneuver sometimes known as the “Tasmanian Dodge.” In this practice, the ward captain would pay a series of voters for their vote. The first voter would go into the booth, put the ticket under his coat, and then leave without voting. He would return to the captain, who would then fill out the ticket and give it to the second voter. This man would then take a ballot, take both the blank ballot and the filled-out ballot into the booth with him, deposit the latter paper, and give the blank ticket to the captain. The process would be repeated on down the line.<sup>135</sup> Although ingenious, there is little hard evidence that the Tasmanian Dodge was ever widely practiced, if it was practiced at all. The stories nonetheless provoked legislators into declaring it a crime to leave a voting booth with a blank ticket, in order to combat the possibility of it occurring.<sup>136</sup>

Nonetheless, many of the changes hoped for or feared about the new style of voting did not happen. It did not immediately provoke large numbers of Americans

into becoming independent voters. Less than three percent of the voters in the 1896 split their tickets. This number rose in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but not by much.<sup>137</sup> Independent voters had always been able to make up their own tickets, long before the introduction of the ballot, through ticket scratching and other practices. Philadelphians, like other Americans, did not vote the straight ticket only out of fear of party bosses. They also did so out of habit and even out of conviction and conscious solidarity with the party cause. At the same time, the fears of critics like Mill and others also were unrealistic. In particular, the idea that the practice of voting the secret ballot would induce voters to think of the franchise as a right, rather than a duty, ignores the extent to which the right of franchise was already a mainstream idea in American politics.<sup>138</sup>

The Australian ballot was a significant change to the celebration of Election Day nonetheless. First, from the viewpoint of promoting democratic options for the voter, the introduction of the Australian form probably helped speed the decline of viable third parties and so-called fusion tickets. Prior to ballot reform, it was possible for any group of citizens to print out a slate and publicize it at the polls.<sup>139</sup> Certainly, this equality among parties was more theoretical than real. Printing costs for ballots were often prohibitive, and third parties were also at a disadvantage when it came to distributing their slates. One of the arguments put forward for the Australian ballot was that political groups would no longer need to pay out huge expenses on Election Day to put their names in front of the public.<sup>140</sup> However, by formally limiting the number of names to appear on a ticket, a government ballot also placed a theoretical

limit on the number of parties presented to the voter. Fusion tickets allowed the cooperation between groups like the Greenbacks or Populists and the Democrats. By manipulating ballot laws, northern Republicans were able to eliminate fusion slates or to make them far more difficult to maintain.<sup>141</sup>

The ballot also formalized a wholly different model of, and for, the democratic voter. The new system created a new space for the voter to act; in so doing it cut him off from all possible social influences. The modern voter would be separated from the world by a curtain drawn around him, left to his own resources. If the vote was still a public act, it was a strange one, in which the most important element of the drama was acted out in private. The secret vote reconstructed the voter as a social atom, acting on his own private thoughts, and not relying on institutions or the wisdom of the tribe. Not the boss, or the priest, or the employer, or even one's cronies, could intrude on the secrecy of the vote. Whether he wanted it or not, the voter was in the position of Bunyan's pilgrim, driving off worldly entanglements in the passage to righteousness.

In the words of Michael Schudson:

Twentieth-century voting was thus free to become a performance of individualism oriented to the nation, not a performance of community directed to the locale. A nineteenth-century voter demonstrated his citizenship through loyalty to party and the local fraternity that was its most palpable manifestation. A twentieth-century voter was obliged to act out something new and untested in the political universe—citizenship by virtue of informed competence. Voting by party ticket and voting by state-supplied ballot are both acts that determine who gets elected to office. But in the former case it tends to be a matter of parties mobilizing their membership; in the latter case it is more nearly an aggregation of individual preferences. The Australian ballot indicated that a new political day and a new understanding of politics had dawned.<sup>142</sup>

Keeping this in mind, one of the most dramatic effects of the Australian ballot was how it changed the interaction of the voting population at the polls. From Victoria province to British parliamentary elections to American Election Days, reformers noted that riotous and violent behavior declined noticeably after the introduction of the new system.<sup>143</sup> With the kind of public secrecy enforced by the Australian ballot, the rationale for much of the traditional bustle and crowds surrounding the voting window disappeared. Ticket-mongers no longer were not longer present, vying with one another to press their slates of candidates onto the approaching voter. Rough and rowdy street toughs no longer presumed to keep the opposition away from the polls. They hadn't improved their manners; they simply were less certain who was friend or foe.

The Australian ballot did not eliminate the ability of the political elite to control the voter at the polls, but it switched the location for this control. In the heyday of the gilded age, control was exercised on the street, through the use of ticket distribution, monetary persuasion, claims on group solidarity, and physical intimidation. The voter's body could be immediately affected, through either enticement or dissuasion. The secret ballot removed that ability. If the voter were to be affected, then it would have to be before he ever reached the election grounds, so that one could be reasonably certain of his intentions before he got to the voting booth. Hence, there was a greater need for persuasion and education, a need to sway the mind, to affect reason and desire, rather than using force directly on the body. The dispersed efforts at controlling ward polls were centralized into a single campaign

effort that could be coordinated from one office. Mass media, first the print media and later electronic media, became central to the effort. Part of the reason for this was that, without party control over the ballot, the politician needed to influence, as much as possible, what the voter saw when he picked up the ballot. Candidates with a media presence would be recognized easily. Those without such resources were fighting a lost battle. In the twentieth century the battle of the election ground became a mass mediated battle, fought over by political managers, not citizens themselves, in the pages of the daily newspapers and on television screens, and not on the Election grounds.

#### The increasing role of the state on Election Night:

The Australian ballot was a direct attack on the corruption of the vote. Other measures were taken to attack another aspect of the Election Day, the atmosphere of intimidation and violence than ran throughout the period. Catto's death can be taken as a sort of watershed event in Philadelphia. The extent of the violence provoked immediate responses among politicians. In Philadelphia, as was the case throughout the country at the time, the urban upper and middle classes were increasingly dissatisfied with the role of violence in public life, and demanded that politicians do something to keep the populace in order. Stokely had run his campaign on a "law and order" platform. He used the events of Election Day 1871 as part of the justification for stricter and more brutal police enforcement and a dramatic increase in the number of officers on the force.<sup>144</sup> "We object in this department," Mayor William Burns

Smith told reporters on the day after the tense 1884 Presidential race, “to amateur fighting. If there is to be any fighting we have a large body of men constantly in the pay of the city to attend to it professionally. We claim a monopoly on that branch of business, and if any of it is to be done we propose to do it ourselves.”<sup>145</sup>

Along with the more aggressive enforcement of the constabulary came a more explicit rendering in the law about the behavior of voters at the polls and on Election Day. When the violence seemed to be at its heights, that is, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Pennsylvania lawmakers began to pass a series of legislative acts aimed at controlling the behavior of the Election Day public. Two different supplements to the election laws, one in 1868 and one in 1869, explicitly laid out the qualifications of voters, and provided legal sanction for challenges. They also provided for citizens who suspected an attempt at fraud to request that a pair of assessors be present on Election Day to watch over the judge and inspectors.<sup>146</sup> A measure passed in 1867 had outlawed parades after dark, in the city of Philadelphia expressly, ten days before the holding of the election, presumably to keep tempers from becoming any more excited than they were already.<sup>147</sup> In 1870, the same act that formally allowed black men to vote in the state also contained an explicit bar on assaulting electors near the polls, and outlined punishments for the offence.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, in March of 1872, just months after the South Street Election Day riots, Harrisburg banned the sale of liquor on Election Day.<sup>149</sup> The law did not have an immediate effect; economics served as a goad to break it, since Election Day was one of the major opportunities in the year for sales. Given the large number of bars and



taverns in the city at the time, it was nearly impossible for police constables to enforce the rule.<sup>150</sup> Gradually, however, the practice became less popular, or at any rate, less publicly acceptable. Reports of Election Days in the 1890s and the early 1900s contain notably fewer descriptions of drunken riots than those of twenty or thirty years earlier.<sup>151</sup>

The use of the police to keep the peace on Election Day was not without its controversies. Philadelphia's voters and their media representatives were under no illusion that the government or its representatives were ever interested in playing the role of the honest, disinterested broker between competing parties. It was an operating assumption among Philadelphians that, on Election Day, police officers had political interests as much as any other group of citizens.<sup>152</sup> (This was not an unreasonable attitude, given that the election would generally determine the hiring practices of the police department for the next several years.) Following the violence of the 1871 election riots, *The Age* railed against a Republican law enforcement administration that saw fit to pursue investigations into the deaths of colored Republicans like Octavius Catto, but not the murder of a Democratic poll inspector.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, *The Inquirer* blamed much of the violence that resulted in six deaths on the day of the 1868 General Election to corrupt sheriff's deputies from the Democratic administration of Mayor Fox. One of these deputies, Moses Louher, stabbed and seriously wounded the next month on the day of the Presidential election, was described as an "old jail bird." In 1896, the same paper printed descriptions of police

officers openly electioneering for “The Combine” at the polls, and harassing Durham’s “reform” voters.<sup>154</sup>

Just as the dividing line between ordinary street thuggery and the ward associations was sometimes hard to discern, so too was the activity of partisan groups and the police. Often, Election Day injuries to policemen came not when they were engaged in the exercise of their official duties but when they participating in a partisan celebration or parade. For example, in an fight following the announcement of Cleveland’s first election, Lt. David Roche was shot in the arm when he marched past the Americus Club with a group of Republican voters and involved himself in the ensuing riot.<sup>155</sup> Voters giving evidence during the investigation into the disputed 1872 state senate by-election mentioned several present or past members of the police force as among the most egregious of those participating in voting fraud.<sup>156</sup>

Whether or not the police really were simply a corrupt and biased arm of city hall, the public understanding of police on Election Day was that they were simply the best equipped and most efficient of the many sources of political muscle available to the bosses. The growing presence of the police was, in some sense, the mere replacement of one set of political toughs with another. But there was a difference, since the superior resources of the police made the possibility of a true street contest unrealistic. The opposition, at least the more perceptive among them, realized the need to reconcile to this new reality. Witness William McMullen’s response following Stokley’s dramatic increases in the police force, when he calmed down a near riotous crowd in his home Fourth Ward and handed the matter over to the police. Since

McMullen was never shy about using force when he felt it was necessary to advance his interests, his decision at this moment can be taken as pragmatic recognition that politics in Philadelphia would now have to accept the police as having the final word on street violence.<sup>157</sup> Having establish their dominance, the police and the state would then ensure that such violence would gradually die away as Election Day moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Conclusion:

The battle between the mugwump reformers and the Machine politicians of Philadelphia over the practice of Election Day amounted to a battle over who would control the Election Day message. The reformers wanted to send a message of a public composed of well-meaning rational individuals, connected to each other through a concern for the common good and their own consciences. The message of the machine's Election Day was one of political loyalty and devotion to the party and the community. Both visions embodied two different elements of Election Day practice. But both also required that the public itself been controlled: in the one case, to obtain partisan victory, in the other, to discipline the public into a performance more to the liking of the reformers.

Election Days in the earlier part of the Gilded Age communicated a public more nearly to the vision of the Machine. The semi-public ticket created a bond between the voter and the local community. The Election Day riots and fights performed the same kind of image of street power that similar riots had in the

Jacksonian age, except that now politicians, and not simply reformers, were becoming more cautious about the Election Day fight, more wary about where such events could lead. The increasingly complex battles over identity complicated the Election Day divisions. There were the new immigrants to deal with, the infusion of the black vote, and the increasing demands of women for the vote. These new voters, or potential voters, meant for a more complicated Election Day, in part because of the often rather violent protests they provoked on the part of more traditional groups in the voting public. The vote's ability to significance difference and distinction was under threat if *everyone* had the right to vote. There needed to be ways of policing the boundaries of the public.

The desire to exercise control over the Election Day public meant altering the forms of communication in which it expressed itself. The introduction of the secret ballot introduced a radical new message into Election Day. It prevented the coercion of the voter, but also made the connection between the individual and the group—the party, the neighborhood, the church—less important. In that, it was simply part of a larger series of changes that were being encouraged both by party leaders and reformers, changes that moved away from the political spectacle and replace old forms of communicating political identity with newer models based on a national campaign delivering images and arguments to the voter through print and other forms of the mass media. Philadelphia's newspapers switched the emphasis of their role, focusing more and more on the unifying event of the Election night celebration, less and less on their role as partisan mobilizer.

At the same time, the formal instruments of the state began to take more notice of the Election Day event. Lawmakers made such traditions as the election night bonfire, the Election Day drink, the Election night parade, illegal; they produced a greater police force in order to force the public to obey these and other restrictions like the ban on betting. Although these traditions had not been at the heart of the complaints about the Election Day celebration, they arguably contributed to the corruption, the violence, the injuries that had resulted on that day.

These changes in the Election Day performance did not do away with the machine. They did not, arguably, reduce the importance of money or social power on the outcome of the vote. They did change the moment when that power was used, and where it was used. The battle for the voter increasingly no longer took place on the election grounds, but before Election Day ever took place. Thus, as a moment of political importance, Election Day itself began to recede. Although the power of the machine still placed a premium on the ability to actually get faithful voters to the polls, Election Day became a day in which less and less happened. The decision of the voter's themselves, certainly, but presumably that decision had been undertaken prior to the day of the vote itself. As this happened, the public event of Election Day began to recede into private spaces—behind the curtain of the voting booth. There was still the Election night celebration. That celebration existed, however, only for commercial reasons, and because it addressed a specific niche. Once that niche could be filled in other ways, the Election night celebration would disappear as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," pp. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Steffens, *The shame of the cities* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), pp. 134, 136; see also George C.S. Benson, *Political corruption in America* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978), pp. 43-45.

<sup>3</sup> James Bryce, Viscount, *The American Commonwealth*, vol. II (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1995) pp. 1047-1052. McManes managed to inspire in Bryce this classic description of the political boss: "Personal capacity, courage, resolution, foresight, the judicious preference of the substance of power to its display, are qualities whose union in one brain is so uncommon in any group of men that their possessor acquires an ascendancy which lasts until he provokes a revolt by oppression, or is seen to be leading his party astray. And by the admission even of his enemies, Mr. McManes possessed these qualities." p. 1050.

<sup>4</sup> Rufus Shapley, *Solid for Mulhooly: a political satire* (New York: Arno Press, 1970[1889]). Biographies of McManes appear in Peter McCaffery, *When bosses ruled Philadelphia: the emergence of the Republican machine, 1867-1933* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), and Harold Zink, *City bosses in the United States: A study of twenty municipal bosses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930) pp. 196-99. Revisionist historians have more recently argued that corruption in American cities of the nineteenth century has been exaggerated, and that the machine had been, in some sense more democratic than what came to replace it Mary Ryan, for example, discounts the common understanding of Tammany Hall as a den of corruption, and of William "Boss" Tweed as the corrupt leader of Tammany, suggesting that these were in effect constructions of a group of wealthy "reformers" worried about the growing power of various ethnic groups, especially Irish Americans, in the city's political structure. Ryan suggests that much of the inefficiency and waste of the Tweed years were the result of an antiquated civic infrastructure attempting to deal with new demographic, economic, and technological realities. Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 279-281.

<sup>5</sup> McCaffery, *When bosses ruled*, pp. 27-44.

<sup>6</sup> "Letter to Col. P.R. Freas, Editor. Germantown Telegraph, Dec. 14, 1871," *The McClure-Gray Senatorial Contest* (n.p., n.d.)

<sup>7</sup> See Louise Overacker, *Money in Elections* (New York: Macmillan, 1932) p. 33-34. Philip E. Converse has argued that high turnouts in the 1800s were primarily the result of voter fraud, see "Comment on Burnham's 'Theory and voting research,'" *American Political Science Review*, 68, 1972, pp. 1024-27. Contrary views can be found in William E. Gienapp, "Politics seemed to Enter into Everything: Political culture in the north, 1840-1860," *Essays on American Antebellum Politics*, pp. 25-27; also Paul Kleppner, *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893-1928* (Westport, CT, Greenwood: 1987) pp. 168-170.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Senate. Committee contesting the election of Henry Gray. *Contested Election. McClure against Gray* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1872), see for example the testimony of poll worker W. C. Snyder, pp. 11-13, and evidence from voters on pp. 14, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 52; Timothy Brophy, another voter, could not remember what sort of election he had been participating in—a regular election or a by-election; *ibid.*, p. 21. While James Coughlin was certain he voted for McClure, he did not know what date or month the election had taken place, *ibid.* p. 27. Similar testimony comes from New York, for example, in this description of a state race: "I think Joe Davis' name was on the State ticket. I did not take any particular notice of other names on the State ticket. I guess I did not vote for any judge. I think I did not; I cannot positively say. I don't know as I took any notice of who were candidates for judge...I cannot tell whether I had been drinking or not before I voted. It's likely I did." Ananais Carter, quoted in Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude republic*, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> PA. Senate. *McClure against Gray*. For example, the testimony of a McClure worker, Benjamin S. McVaugh: "I distributed Mr. McClure's tickets at the polls. Between the hours of 12 and 1, I distributed 22 tickets. I kept an account of them as near as I could as they went to the window. Mr. Snyder [another McClure worker] and I counted 22 tickets." pp. 8,9.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baker, *Affairs of party*, p. 306. Baker also notes, however, that the practice was of dubious legality, despite being widely practiced. Also Eldon Cobb Evans, *A history of the Australian Ballot System in the United States*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1917, pp. 6-8, notes a variety of ways that a ticket could be marked, from the style of paper to the size of the ticket. See also L.E.

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Fredman, *The Australian Ballot: the story of an American Reform* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1968) p. 22; McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, p. 29. For an example of a marked ballot, see the photo of a "tapeworm" ballot, used in California during this period: Kelly, *Election Day*, p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> P.A. Senate. *Contested Election, McClure-Gray*, pp. 8,9; Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up: The life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824-1901* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989), p. 18; see Baker, *Affairs of party*, pp. 308, 309, for description of a similar scene in Baltimore.

<sup>13</sup> For examples of the newspaper listing the public choices of voters in the newspaper pages, see *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 9, 1872, p. 2 (hereafter referred to as *Inquirer*); also *Inquirer*, Oct. 11, 1871, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Age*, Oct. 29, 1872, p. 2, for an example of Democratic accusations against the Republicans; *The Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1888, p. 4, is an example of accusations from the other side.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of stories about accusations of ballot tricks and other varieties of Election Day fraud are in *The Age*, Nov. 4, 1868, p. 1, and Nov. 6, 1872, p.1; *North American*, Nov. 7, 1876, p. 1; *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1888, p. 4; and *North American*, Nov. 8, 1892, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1880, p. 2;

<sup>17</sup> Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and rebellion*, pp. 14-17.

<sup>18</sup> Examples of knifing or cutting are mentioned in the *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1880, p. 2; *ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1876, p. 2; *ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1872, p. 2. The explanation of the term is from Fredman, *Australian ballot*, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1888, p. 2, gives an example of the practice.

<sup>20</sup> As Mark Summers notes, it is unlikely that many "vest-pocket" voters showed up at the polls. *Rum, Romanism, and rebellion*, p. 15. Voting records from 1892 and 1893 elections (note that these were both after the introduction of the secret ballot, indicate the extent to which most voters voted the straight party ticket. Some examples: in 1892, there were 103, 700 Republican votes for President, 103, 604 and for Supreme Court Judge a difference of 94 votes, or 0.09 percent of the total Presidential vote. In 1893, the difference between Democratic votes for sheriff and for city comptroller was 183 votes, or 0.3 per cent of the total number cast for sheriff: figures are from Charles A. Brinley, *A Handbook for Philadelphia Voters* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1894), pp. 165,169.

<sup>21</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 28, 1880, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Not surprisingly, the vest pocket voter was also a proper model of behavior in the pages of the *Public Ledger*, which became even more closely allied to political reform after the war as it had been before: see the Election Day editorial in *Public Ledger*, Nov. 4, 1884, p. 2, celebrating thoughtfulness and sobriety on the vote. However, as in the antebellum years, even strongly partisan papers often found it useful to attack party politics and paper rhetoric. See the Republican *Bulletin*, Oct. 8, 1860: "All citizens should turn out and vote according to their convictions and right, and not according to the decisions of partisan leaders, or the bargains of committees." p. 4. See also the attack on "partisan journals" in *The Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 11, 1860, p. 2 (at the time a strongly pro-Democrat paper.)

<sup>23</sup> McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42 ff. An example of the attitude of this reforming class can be found on a front page story in *North American*, Oct. 4, 1860, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, p. 59

<sup>26</sup> McCaffery, *When bosses ruled*, pp. 2-9. Probably the most notable exception to this pattern was Boies Penrose, a Philadelphia blue-blood who looked with some disdain upon reformers, particularly those from his own class. The feelings were generally reciprocated. Progressive magazines like *The New Republic* painted Penrose as a poster-boy for political corruption. A biography of Penrose can be found in John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981) pp. 49-82. According to John F. Reynolds, a number of the economic elite were important in New Jersey politics. Unlike Penrose, however, these men seem to have made it a practice to stay out of the public limelight, and rarely ran for office. Reynolds, *Testing Democracy: Electoral behavior and Progressive reform in New Jersey, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1988) p. 18.

- <sup>27</sup> Steffens claimed that voting fraud was so pervasive under the city's Republican machine that the "honest citizens of Philadelphia have no more rights at the polls than the Negroes down south." *Shame of the cities*, p. 138. See also McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, pp. 46-48, 54; Fredman, *Australian ballot*, pp. 28-40.
- <sup>28</sup> McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, pp. 77-78.
- <sup>29</sup> Keyssar, *The right to vote*, pp. 77-80. Sidney Fisher once wrote in his diary that he always voted "against the mob, upon principle." *Diary*, p. 85. See also the editorial in the *North American*, Oct. 4, 1860, p. 2. A former Whig journal, the *North American*, like many in Philadelphia's upper middle class, while staunchly anti-Democracy, also distrusted the new Republican party for its populist approach and self-righteous tone. See the comments of the patrician Fisher on the new party: *Diary*, p. 367, 368.
- <sup>30</sup> J.T. Headley, *Pen and Pencil Sketches of the Great Riots* (New York City: Arno Press, 1969) pp. 66, 67. Of course, many reformers had their doubts about the moral fitness of the newly enfranchised former slaves. Even a young W.E.B. DuBois, still under the influence of his graduate instructors at Harvard, felt that the move to give full rights of suffrage to all blacks, irrespective of education and social standing, had been unwise. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, p. 368.
- <sup>31</sup> Keyssar, *The right to vote*, p. 136-141, illustrates how residency requirements were used to attack immigrant voters. While Pennsylvania did enact slightly stricter requirements at this time, however, they probably had less of an effect there than in some other states and cities. The Republican party did stymie efforts at eliminating the tax requirement for voters. This was not through the efforts of reformers, however, but politicians. It was through the use of tax payments that machine politicians coerced voters into supporting the party at the polls, *ibid.*, pp. 131-132, Table A.15.
- <sup>32</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 1, 1896, pp., 1, 4.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1896, p.1. *The Press*, another Republican newspaper, but a supporter of the Martin forces, managed to see through the deception: see the issue of Nov. 4, 1896, pp. 1, 2.
- <sup>34</sup> The lack of success of the reform movement in Philadelphia is recounted by McCaffery, *When bosses ruled*, pp. 161-188.
- <sup>35</sup> Zink, *City bosses in the United States*, p. 212.
- <sup>36</sup> McCaffery, *When bosses ruled*, p. 78-82.
- <sup>37</sup> Reports of Catto's death are taken from *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1871, p. 2, and Harry C. Silcox, "Nineteenth Century Philadelphia Black Militant: Octavius V. Catto," (1839-1971), *Pennsylvania History*, 44.1 (1977). Coverage of the funeral of Catto, one of the largest and most elaborate of the period, for any Philadelphian, black or white, is in *Inquirer*, Oct. 14, 1871.
- <sup>38</sup> Silcox, "Octavius V. Catto," pp. 58-71.
- <sup>39</sup> It would be seven years before Frank Kelly would be brought to trial for Catto's murder. An associate of prominent Democratic politician William "Squire" McMullen, Kelly was unanimously declared not guilty by a local jury. See Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up*, pp. 87-89; and Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 203.
- <sup>40</sup> Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 200.
- <sup>41</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 11, 1871, p. 2
- <sup>42</sup> See *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1871; Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 200, Kelly was also charged in Chase's death, and again found not guilty, Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the ground up*, p. 78.
- <sup>43</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1871. p. 2;
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, Silcox, *Philadelphia politics*, argues that Fourth Ward boss McMullen "was certainly behind much of what happened in the Fourth Ward on Election Day." p. 82.
- <sup>45</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1871, p. 2.
- <sup>46</sup> Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 199.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1864, p. 8
- <sup>49</sup> Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 207.



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<sup>50</sup> Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up, passim*, gives the life story of McMullen, including his violent beginnings. Shorter biographies of McManes, McMullen, and Stokely are in McCaffery, *When Bosses ruled*.

<sup>51</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "A further supplement to the act relative to elections of this commonwealth," *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania*, 1867, section 10, p. 55. Also Edward Price, "The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 100.3 (1976).

<sup>52</sup> *The Age*, Nov. 5, 1872, p. 2. In its Election Day editorial against Breckenridge, the Presidential candidate of Southern Democrats in the 1860 race, the pro-Douglas *Press's* central attacked the southerner's loyalty and qualification for office was that four years earlier he had gone hunting instead of going to the polls. Nov. 6, 1860, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> The history of blacks and the Republican Party between the Civil War and the turn of the century can be found in Hanes Walton, Jr. *Black Republicans: The politics of the Black and Tans* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975) pp. 18-25, 36-43, and Matthew Rees, *From the Deck to the Sea: Blacks and the Republican Party* (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1991) pp. 33-99.

<sup>54</sup> For example, on its editorial page of Nov. 2, 1888, the *Inquirer* printed a piece of doggerel poetry titled "New York City's Elect." A general attack on Tammany Hall and New York City's Irish immigrants, the poem made a point of stressing the racism of the city's Irish population and ironically alluded to a time "when darkies by lamp posts were strung by a halter." A short Election Day piece in *The North American* claimed that Democrat supporters were full of slavery-justifying clergy and men who had each "killed their nigger." Nov. 7, 1876, p. 1. Admittedly, the Democrats provided ample evidence for the charges, as when *The Age* called Republicans "Negro worshippers," Oct. 13, 1868, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Black citizens often felt aggrieved that they were not given the sort of political favors their strong support of the Republican party would have warranted. See W.E.B. DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, pp. 374-375; "The issue of jobs in government and related businesses was by far the most important political concern in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century black Philadelphia." Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours*, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 209 ff. Silcox, *Philadelphia politics*, agrees, but adds that until the late 1870s or early 1880s, black Philadelphians actually were able to gain significant concessions thanks to their electoral loyalty, pp. 108, 109.

<sup>57</sup> Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up*, pp. 62-64, 74-76, 142-145. Peter McCaffery, *When bosses ruled Philadelphia*.

<sup>58</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1864, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *North American*, Oct. 11, 1864, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1864, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1876, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1888, p. 4,

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> "Every rebel, copperhead, bounty-jumper, deserter, Son of Liberty, Knight of the Golden Circle, and Ku Klux Klan is a democrat...every man who burned Negro children in orphan asylums...who tried to introduce yellow fever and cholera into northern cities," wrote the *North American*, Oct. 13, 1868. p. 1. On Nov. 6, 1872, p. 1, *Inquirer* printed attacks on Samuel Tilden for appealing to Southern Democrats in order to save victory. A month earlier, the same paper argued that Ohio and Indiana would not had the country to the "solid south." *Inquirer*, Oct. 11, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1900, p.1 and p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> *The Age*, Nov. 3, 1868, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *The Age*, Oct. 9, 1872, p. 1; and Nov. 6, p. 1. In an Oct. 10, 1872, story, the paper wrote that "few thinking men" could not suppose fraud at the General Election. Even the paper's advertisers made the charge. Ad copy for a men's store directly after the election, titled "Queer," mentioned that while many things in the recent election seemed "queer," it was not queer that people were availing themselves of Rochhill and Wilson's elegant suits. See *The Age*, Oct. 10, 1872, p. 2.

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- <sup>68</sup> See, for example, the story in *The Age*, Oct. 9, 1872, p. 1.
- <sup>69</sup> See mocking attacks on Irish immigrants in *North American*, Oct. 15, 1868, p. 15; and the *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 7.
- <sup>70</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1860, p. 8; *The Philadelphia Press*, Nov. 7, 1860, p. 2 (hereafter referred to as *Press*).
- <sup>71</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1871, p. 2.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1888, p. 3.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 7.
- <sup>74</sup> A cartoon concerning "queer" election bets refers to several weddings being contingent on McKinley's victory, *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 7. See another story, *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1912, p. 2, about women in the Bull Moose party delivering luncheons and devilled eggs.
- <sup>75</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 2.
- <sup>76</sup> "CITY BULLETIN" and other items, *Bulletin*, Oct. 13, 1852, p. 2
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>78</sup> A particularly gruesome incident occurred in the city around the turn of the century. On Election night, 1908, 9-year-old Hermione Lea was horribly burned when her brother and several other boys threw some gasoline onto a Bryan effigy that refused to light. The fire exploded onto Hermione, whose misfortune only increased when her brothers and the others around the fire, in their attempts to put the flames out, beat her nearly to death with sticks and brooms. *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1908, p. 3.
- <sup>79</sup> See the account in the *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1888, p. 2 Also the account of Al Smith, *Up to Now—An Autobiography* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1929) pp. 53-54.
- <sup>80</sup> Commenting on the bonfires on Nov. 9, 1904, *Inquirer* wrote that they were "young Philadelphia's way of showing he joined in the enthusiasm of his elders," p. 3. The link between youth, fire, and community ceremony evident in Election Day of the nineteenth century has intriguing analogies to the role fire played in certain ceremonial practices in twentieth century Israel. In analyzing the latter practices, Tamar Katriel has argued that fire, as "ephemeral" symbol, allows participants to combine both the canonical unchanging message of the ritual with the *ad hoc* illustration of the participants' actual state, linking the present to the past: Katriel, *Communal webs: communication and culture in contemporary Israel* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991).
- <sup>81</sup> The reports of the stabbing and shooting are in *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1904, p. 3. That the practice of building bonfires was widespread, at least along the urban centers of the Eastern seaboard, is suggested by Al Smith, *Up to Now—An Autobiography*, p. 53.
- <sup>82</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1888, p. 2.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1884, p. 8.
- <sup>84</sup> *Public Ledger*, Oct. 8, 1836.
- <sup>85</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 9, 1872.
- <sup>86</sup> In Oct. 31, 1888, p. 4, a short item in the *Inquirer* suggested that the next public campaign contest would be between "fool-killers" and the makers of novel election bets. In the same paper, Nov. 6, 1888, p. 4, an editorial suggested having a post-election parade of fools who bet money on the campaign. The paper said it would certainly outnumber an ordinary campaign parade in terms of numbers represented.
- <sup>87</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1892, p. 2
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1892, p. 2.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1892, p. 1.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1892, p. 5.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1900, p. 7; Nov. 9, 1900, p. 2.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1892, p. 6.
- <sup>94</sup> See stories in *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1892, p. 6; Nov. 2, 1896, p. 5, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 5; See also pictures of losing bettors in the same paper, Nov. 10, 1892, p. 2, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 7. Reports of Election Day bets throughout the United States can be found in Kelly, *Election Day*, pp. 151, 162, 154.
- <sup>95</sup> *North American*, Nov. 12, 1888, p. 1.
- <sup>96</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1892, p. 6.

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<sup>97</sup> The story of the inter-racial wager is in *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1900, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> *The Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1896, p. 3 told the story of Democrat Edward Bailey pushing a friend up a street in a pushcart. A band accompanied him, and he was proceeded by a color guard bearing an American flag and a large transparency saying "I thought I knew it all." Bailey was a wealthy contractor in the city and an influential man in its politics. The story mentions that the street was crowded for two blocks.

<sup>99</sup> *North American*, Nov. 12, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> For descriptions of Election night in Philadelphia during this period see *The Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1896, p. 2; *The North American*, Nov. 5, 1884, p. 2; *The Public Ledger*, Nov. 5, 1884, p. 4, and *The Press*, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Gerald Baldasty, *The commercialization of news in the nineteenth century* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) pp. 52-58; also Barnhurst and Nerone, *Form of the news*, pp. 69-75.

<sup>102</sup> Baldasty, *Commercialization of news*, pp. 88-112.

<sup>103</sup> Schudson, *Discovery of the news*, pp. 95-97; Baldasty, *Commercialization of news*, pp. 134-137.

<sup>104</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 2. Four years earlier, the paper estimated the crowd to be 20,000 in front of the *Inquirer* Building and 100,000 in the entire downtown, *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 2. See also *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 13, 1880, Oct. 13, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> *Press*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1900, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1900, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> The telegraph made a dramatic difference to the style of reporting in Election Day editions, as papers published later in the day would carry results from other cities, like Boston, New York, and Baltimore. One of more interesting examples came in 1872, when early returns from Louisiana led to Republican papers announcing the state for Grant, while in Democratic papers it was going for his opponents: compare *The Press*, Nov. 5, 1872, p. 1; to *The Age*, Nov. 5, 1872, p.1. Announcements of McKinley's overwhelming victory over Byran in 1896 were reported at the Union League headquarters as early as 9:10 pm: see *The Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1896, p. 2. Four years later, the Republican victory in the Presidential race was known by 11 pm at the latest, when the Union League stepped out into the street for a celebratory parade, *The Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> In 1860, Sidney Fisher noted, the telegraph brought news of Lincolns' victory the night of the vote itself. Fisher, *Diary*, p. 368. An example of an Election Day map is in *The Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Jack Rakove, "Butterflies, Chads, and History," *The New York Times*, Nov. 29, 2000, p. A35. Later, an *Inquirer* editorial supported the wisdom of a nation-wide coordination of elections because it would mean less disruption to the lives of citizens. General Election Days, in addition to a Presidential Election Day only expanded the amount of disruption and the loss of economic activity that politics brought into the country, it argued. *The Inquirer*, Oct. 13, 1876, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Littlewood, *Calling Elections*: pp. 9-11, provides an example of how this worked in Boston during the period.

<sup>115</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1896, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> See reports of parades in *Inquirer*, Oct. 13, 1880, p. 2; *North American*, Nov. 5, 1884, p. 2; *Public Ledger*, Nov. 5, 1884, p. 4, and *Public Ledger*, Nov.4, 1896, p. 2. The general hilarity of the winners could often draw scorn from the losing side, as in the *Press*'s comments on Republican celebrations in Nov. 7, 1860, edition, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> See the quote from Mayor Smith in *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1884, op cit.

<sup>119</sup> An account of voters serenading candidate Charles O'Neill is in *Inquirer*, Oct. 13, 1864, p. 2. An account of Election night celebrations on 1900 mentions, among a military brass band, biograph pictures, cartoons, and \$1,000 worth of fireworks. *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1852, p. 2.

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- <sup>121</sup> See editorials in the *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1888, p.4; Nov. 1, 1900, p. 8.
- <sup>122</sup> Walter D. Burnham, "The Appearance and Disappearance of the American Voter," in *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- <sup>123</sup> McGerr, *The decline in popular politics*, pp. 205-210.
- <sup>124</sup> Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," p. 2 ff.
- <sup>125</sup> L.E. Fredman, *The Australian Ballot: the story of an American Reform*, p. 3; John H. Wigmore, *The Australian Ballot System as embodied in the legislation of various countries* (Boston, Boston Book Company: 1889) p. 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Eldon Cobb Evans, *A history of the Australian Ballot System in the United States*, p. 21-23.
- <sup>127</sup> Evans, *A history of the Australian ballot system*, p. 24.
- <sup>128</sup> J.S. Mill, "Of the mode of voting," in *Essays on Politics and Society*, p. 490. Italics author's.
- <sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 489.
- <sup>130</sup> Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "Identifiable Voting in Nineteenth-Century America: Toward a Comparison of Britain and the United States before the Secret Ballot," *Perspectives in American History*, 11 (1977-78) p. 263; also McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, p. 29.
- <sup>131</sup> Fredman, *Australian ballot*, pp. 31, 32. The Kentucky law is found in Wigmore, *Australian ballot system*, pp. 138-144.
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-89.
- <sup>133</sup> Fredman, *The Australian ballot system*, pp. 97, 98.
- <sup>134</sup> Fredman, *The Australian ballot*, p. 20 ff. also, PA. Senate. *Contested Election, McClure against Gray, passim*; It is not clear that the average voter, in contrast to the political rhetoricians, always viewed a bribe as a corruption of the vote. Michael Schudson has argued, for example, that many voters may have simply seen money for a vote as payment for services rendered. Given the nature of the culture in which the vote took place, it was not always clear what was a bribe and what was not. There was a long tradition of candidates and their friend treating voters, in Philadelphia and elsewhere throughout the United States, to alcohol or food on Election Day. The difference between receiving several dollars to treat oneself and one's friends to beer, and simply receiving the beer itself, could have seemed somewhat formal to the man on the street. Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 162, 163. See also Reynolds, *Testing Democracy*, p. 54, who links bribery with the tradition of candidates "treating" voters. Philadelphia's election laws also encouraged some confusion in this area. Although all adult males were, in theory, entitle to vote, for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they did need to pay a minimal tax in order to exercise that right. Many party leaders would agree to pay the voter's tax, and supply him with a receipt for the Election Day window, in return for the favor of a vote. This practice also made the question of what was, and what was not, a bribe somewhat confusing. Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, p. 201. In an Election Day story in *The North American*, a city judge rules against the practice, while a Republican Party lawyer tries to argue that it may be "immoral, but is it illegal?" Nov. 12, 1888, p. 4.
- <sup>135</sup> Wigmore, *The Australian Ballot System*, p. 72; L. Massicote, *Notes on the history of the electoral system in Canada from its origins to the present day*. Paper prepared for Elections Canada, March 1995.
- <sup>136</sup> An article in *The Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1892, p. 2, about the existence of counterfeit ballots being printed in order to practice something like the dodge seems to indicate that awareness of the practice, if not the actual practice itself, existed in Philadelphia.
- <sup>137</sup> Brinley, *Handbook for Philadelphia Voters*, pp. 165-169; Schudson, *The good citizen*, p. 170.
- <sup>138</sup> Most of the expansion of the right to vote came about, in part, because of certain excluded groups claiming that "right" based on certain contributions they had made to society—either by fighting in the nation's wars, or by contributing taxes to the state coffers. The women's suffrage movement, which preceded the introduction of the Australian ballot by several decades, was essentially based on the claim that women had the same rights as men, and therefore should be allowed the vote. Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: the woman's rights movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press: 1975).
- <sup>139</sup> Summers, *Rum, Romanism, & Rebellion: the making of a President, 1884*, p. 15.
- <sup>140</sup> Evans, *A history of the Australian Ballot*, p. 23.

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<sup>141</sup> P. H. Argersinger, "A place on the ballot: fusion politics and antifusion laws, *The American Historical Review*, 85.2 (1980).

<sup>142</sup> Schudson, *The good citizen*, p. 173.

<sup>143</sup> Such claims need to be read with the understanding that reformers wanted to see these sorts of effects. Nonetheless, reports of violence at the polls among Philadelphia's newspapers drop dramatically in the years following the introduction of the Australian system. Evans, *A History of the Australian ballot*, p. 23. But Fredman, *The Australian Ballot*, pp. 84, 85. notes that in many jurisdictions, especially large cities like Chicago, violence and bribery continued to flourish.

<sup>144</sup> Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia*, pp. 200, 201. Noting the quietness of the 1863 general election, Sidney Fisher credited this to the ample presence of the police and the military, not to the population. Such precautions, he added, "are necessary now." Fisher, *Diary*, P. 461.

<sup>145</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1884, p. 9. Because of the closeness of the race and the bitterness between the two major parties (Democrats were still angered at the "stolen" election of 1876), feelings were running especially high at the time. See Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion*, pp. 7-12.

<sup>146</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "A further supplement to the Act relating to the Elections of this commonwealth," *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania*, 1868, no. 3; and PA. "An Act further supplemental to the act..." *Laws*, 1869, no. 38.

<sup>147</sup> Pennsylvania. "An Act to prohibit political processions," *Laws*, 1867, no. 1070, p. 1129.

<sup>148</sup> Pennsylvania. "Supplement," *PA Laws*, 1870, p. 55, section 9.

<sup>149</sup> Pennsylvania. "An Act to prevent the sale of intoxicating drinks on Election Day," *Laws*, 1872, no. 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 5, 1872, p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> See accounts of the 1872 Election days, *ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1872, p. 2; *ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1872, p. 2, noting the dullness of Election Day and crediting this, in part, to the ban on liquor sales.

<sup>152</sup> Partisan attacks on the police's role in Election Day had started as early as the 1830s: *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 13, 1836, p. 2; Oct. 14, 1836, p. 2. See also testimony in Senate Committee. McClure vs. Gray, on the role of policemen at the polls and in voting.

<sup>153</sup> *The Age*, Oct. 24, 1871.

<sup>154</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1896, p. 7. The General Election of 1868 in fact seems to have been essentially a war between the police, controlled by a Republican mayor, and the deputies of the Democratic Sheriff. See *The North American and United States Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1868, p. 1, and *The Age*, Oct. 14, 1868, p. 1, for the two sides of the story. The fighting became so fierce around the State House that the *North American* would describe it the surrounding street the next day as a "kaleidoscope," covered with the remains of broken bottles and broken heads. Oct. 15, 1868, p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> *Inquirer.*, Nov. 6, 1884, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> PA. Senate. *Contested Election. McClure-Gray*, pp. 9, 14, 34.

<sup>157</sup> Silcox, *Philadelphia politics from the bottom up*, p. 71.

## **Chapter Seven: Election Day in the early twentieth century**

Historians of American politics have long recognized that a dramatic shift happened in the years immediately prior to and after the turn of the twentieth century. This involved, among other things, voter turnout, which out began to decline during this period from the highs of the nineteenth century, and never recovered to its former levels.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the country's popular culture changed, with a decline in the importance that politics played in American life generally. From an era when a national presidential race could virtually bring a city like Philadelphia to a standstill on Election Day, politics seemed to become less central to the interests of the citizens. Sports, popular arts like vaudeville and motion pictures, and the market: these elements of public life gradually moved in to replacement politics as a topic of popular interest.

This would imply that the early twentieth century was the moment when the Election Day celebration, like other popular displays of the electoral public, disappeared from Philadelphia and other Northern cities. As we will see, in the case of Philadelphia at least this is not quite true. It is nevertheless true that Election Day in the city did change in character, and this change was related to practices that embodied both a changing style of politics and a revised understanding of political actors' roles. Election Day became an event that was increasingly practiced in private spaces, or in the mass mediated spaces created through new communication forms like the radio. It became less and less the case that the public met together physically in the center of

the city to celebrate the vote together, more and more the case that this public began to segment itself into smaller groups, meeting in smaller spaces. The image of the public became a more amorphous one, its outlines less clear. This evolution happened slowly. Even by the end of the period under consideration here, the early 1940s, there were still elements of both the Election Day celebration present in the city. But it would not last long past the Second World War.

A changing context for Election Day:

The twentieth century Election Day took place in a political culture quite different from what even the late nineteenth century had presented to Philadelphia's public. At the national level, the period following William Jennings Bryan's first campaign resulted in the creation of something like a national consensus over external and internal policy, a consensus generally overseen by Republican administrations, with the exception of Woodrow Wilson, who did not strongly challenge that consensus.<sup>2</sup> This new political universe, as noted in the previous chapter, would develop its own political style. The new style of campaign featured two important innovations that moved the electoral experience away from earlier forms of popular involvement. First, it relied to a much greater extent on mass media material produced by a national campaign headquarters. Partisan newspapers like Philadelphia's *Press* and *Inquirer* continued to be important methods of party communication, but in addition to these were now pamphlets and other materials produced by the central campaign office.<sup>3</sup> Second, the Presidential candidate himself began to campaign

directly. In the nineteenth century, the traditional, republican-inspired norm against putting oneself forward as a candidate had generally kept Presidential candidates away from the campaign trail (notable exceptions were Stephen Douglas in 1860 and William Jennings Bryan in 1896). This began to change in the twentieth century, and Presidential candidates took advantage of the expanded possibilities afforded by the development of a national transportation system to make national tours.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that campaign practices were changing, Michael Schudson argues, there was a related development: the rise of the “informed voter” model in public discourse. This model is one that emphasizes the normative ideal of a rational, sober individual attempting to gather as much information as possible about policies and candidates and then arriving at a well-considered opinion. In this vision of citizenship, the link between the individual and the group becomes less clear. Group allegiances, including party allegiances, are taken to be prejudicial to the proper exercise of citizenship. Although some form of this argument exists throughout American history—indeed, as Schudson admits, it is implied by the liberal democratic form of government itself—it became during the early twentieth century, he argues, something like the dominant model of citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

While this was going on, important changes took place in the voting public itself. With the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920, the formal boundaries of the electorate swelled to include a huge portion of the adult population—women—that had heretofore almost universally been excluded from the Election Day performance.<sup>6</sup> However, while this constitutional expansion of the electorate was taking place, a new



problem arose, already noted above: the non-voter, who chose deliberately to absent him or herself from the voting booth. As voting turnout began to decline, the question of how to encourage voting became a public issue.<sup>7</sup>

At the city level, Philadelphia politics was characterized by the development of the Republican machine. Although that machine was in place during the nineteenth century, its control was not as great then as it became during this period. For much of the early part of the twentieth century, political battles at the city level were waged not so much between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, the latter organization having become almost irrelevant, for all intents and purposes, but between the Republican "organization," symbolized in the media by the Vare brothers and their strong base of support in South Philadelphia, and reform movements both within and without the party.<sup>8</sup>

Two other changes also occurred at this moment that are of note. First, the introduction or rapid growth of new forms of communication technology, notably the telephone and the radio, had an important impact on the practice of Election Day, since both mediums allowed citizens to get results about national and local races without physically going to newspaper or political club. Second, internationally, the 1920s and the 1930s saw the development of two political ideologies profoundly in opposition to the ideals of liberal democracy. By the 1930s, much of the political rhetoric surrounding Election Day began to refer to the new threats of communism and nazism, so that the true opposition became not so much between the country major parties but between these anti-liberal doctrines and American democracy.

### The performance of Election Day and the secret ballot:

In the copy of Philadelphia's newspapers, the secret ballot was reason's defense against power. Cartoons on Election Day or just prior to it highlighted the role of the vote in conferring power and dignity on the common man. *The Daily News* showed a man caught in the yoke of foreign dictatorship asking "the American voter" what an election was.<sup>9</sup> An *Inquirer* cartoon featured, in its first panel, a milquetoast of a man huddling under the huge image of the "Democratic boss," with his bowler hat and fat stogie. In the second panel, the voter walks out of the voting booth while the boss stands by and steams. While the boss could determine how you registered, he could not follow you into the booth.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, an Election Day cartoon featured in *The Record* featured the common man again displaying his dignity and democratic nobility as he stood by himself on a stage before the nation. The cartoon ran under the title, "It's his turn at the mike."<sup>11</sup>

Papers also began to make a point of describing how the Presidential candidate had voted in their pages, linking the common man in their imagery to that of political celebrity, as in this report of McKinley's visit to the polls at Canton.

The Republican nominee started for the polls at 8:30, walking down Market street to Fourth street, where the voting booth of Precinct A, First Ward, is located. He was accompanied by Abner McKinley and his nephew, Samuel Saxton. It was an easy morning walk, such as any citizen might take on a fine morning. Men raised their hats as he passed and the ladies on the residence steps waved their well wishes. Turning into Fourth street there were cheers from the men and hand-clapping from the working girls in the upper windows of the factory. At each salutation the Major [McKinley] raised his hat and smiled back an acknowledgment. As he entered the small store in which the booths are

located there was a stir of agitation among the officials, and a mild rustle of applause. The nominee took his place in the line and the systematic march of the Australian balloting proceeded in truly democratic fashion. Ahead of Major McKinley was a swarthy faced workingman, whose hands showed he had just laid down his tools. With some confusion he greeted the Major and offered to yield his place but the offer was declined with a whisper in the man's ear that made him beam.<sup>12</sup>

The Presidential voting experience combined the democratic paradox into a single image. In the fundamental Election Day performance, the candidate became one citizen, equal but not superior to millions of others, obliged to wait to vote along with the rest, behind the soiled and otherwise anonymous American working man. "With no more ceremony than that observed by a private citizen, President Taft went out Madison road...and cast his ballot."<sup>13</sup> Like the rest of the voters on that day, on Election Day the President was simply one person among the great democratic mass, an undifferentiated American. Thus the vote not only protected the common man. It elevated him to a status equal to the highest in the land.

This was not the only model of the vote and the voter presented to Philadelphians at this time, however. Violence continued to plague Election Day in the early decades of twentieth century Philadelphia, albeit not the mob clashes that had often been a feature of the nineteenth century. Police were still occasionally accused of manhandling voters at the polls.<sup>14</sup> In 1904, a group of Negro voters stopped a Democratic ward leader named Thomas Kavanaugh and pulled him out of his cab and into the street.<sup>15</sup> There were scuffles the same year in the Fifth ward following challenges to Republican voters, and an election brawl in Leiperville, a small town outside the city, that involved blackjacks, revolvers and stones.<sup>16</sup> Four years later, a

man poured a bottle of vitriol over the face of a teenage boy and badly injured him after an argument in the center of the city on Election night.<sup>17</sup> A colored man suffered a broken arm after an Election Day fight that year, and a 63 year-old storekeeper was knocked down and trampled on by a group of boys after he tried to stop them from stealing wood for a bonfire.<sup>18</sup> Policeman George Epperly died on a primary Election Day in 1917, the victim of gunfire at the polls. At late as 1940, there were partisan fistfights the day before the Election, as Democrats made raids on booths promoting Republican Wendell Wilkie.<sup>19</sup>

As in earlier decades, one important response to the problem of violence was to increase the presence of the police. In 1912, the city hired 40 temporary policemen and 300 Burns private detectives to keep watch on the polls (possibly as a response to accusations of bias on the part of regular constables). Additional men were assigned to outer wards from the main central police station.<sup>20</sup> *The Evening News*, in a story about the quiet Election Day of that year, credited the increased police presence for the calm.<sup>21</sup> In 1916, 3,000 extra men were brought in.<sup>22</sup> In 1936, when violence had become less of an issue, the city still decided to add 2,000 extra men to the Election night detail.<sup>23</sup> Although these measures did not eliminate violence from Election Day entirely, they were successful enough that Irish writer W.B. Yeats was quoted in 1928 as saying that Philadelphia's elections were "damnably quiet and rather boring."<sup>24</sup>

Other problems were not so easily solved. Although the Australian ballot theoretically made the voter's choice unknowable to anyone other than the voter him or herself, work by Joseph Harris in Philadelphia and other urban centers provided

evidence that party workers often found ways of circumventing that feature by, for example, “assisting” the voter in filling out a ballot.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, there was the issue of counting the ballots. As long as corrupt machines could control the count, reformers charged, they could manipulate vote totals and essentially nullify attempts to defeat them at the polls.<sup>26</sup>

Not only did the ballot not eliminate corruption, it introduced an entirely new problem: it was confusing to use. Much of the space on the *Inquirer's* Election Day pages during the first decades of the twentieth century was spent on literally telling voters where and how to mark their ballots. The academic discourse surrounding elections in the modern age tends to downplay the challenges presented in the simple act of voting (although the events in Florida during the 2000 Election Day may change this somewhat). In 1908, the problem was more obvious. Since the beginning of the nation, Philadelphians had learned to cast votes in a certain way, using certain institutional guides—the party vote dispenser on the Election grounds, the identifying mark on the ticket—to guide them. Whatever challenges voting in the Gilded Age presented to the voter, they were at least familiar challenges. The Australian ballot introduced a whole new set of practices, and provided no opportunity at all to learn these before the day of the vote. Not surprisingly, voting for a time became a very confusing act. The election of 1892 resulted in 27,000 spoiled ballots in Massachusetts, 20,000 in Ohio. People marked the wrong boxes, they marked too many boxes or not enough; they marked the ballots incorrectly.<sup>27</sup> Voting had always been, and remained, more complicated in the United States than in other countries,

given the large number of offices Americans vote for on Election Day and the large number of policy questions on the ballot. The new ballots presented to citizens were extraordinarily complicated. The 1892 ballot required the voter to make 43 separate choices (voters at this time were still allowed to vote for the state's 32 Presidential electors separately). Pennsylvania's ballot allowed voters to mark a circle at the top of a slate to vote the straight party line, but this helped matters only slightly. The 1896 ballot contained 11 different parties, with varying combinations of candidates and with many party slates sharing candidates in common. The McKinley-Citizens and Republican slates were identical except for the office of sheriff (listed in small print at the bottom of the ticket). There was also a McKinley-Crow slate, different from the McKinley-Citizens (it contained choice only for sheriff and county commissioner). The Democratic, People's and Free Silver tickets all supported Bryan for President, but the People's ticket had a different Vice Presidential choice. The Democratic and Free Silver tickets differed on their local choices for offices. Most of the slates did not include candidates for all offices; the McKinley-Citizens and Republican slates were the only exception here. Voting for any slate other than these two, a voter had to make extra marks to make choices for these other offices.<sup>28</sup> Things only got worse. In 1912, sample ballots were 27 inches by 32 inches in area. Ballots were so large that they would delay the counting of votes, since ballot boxes needed to be emptied so often. Sometimes, voting had to stop in order to get more, and bigger, ballot boxes.<sup>29</sup>

The possibility that the secret ballot might confuse voters was, not surprisingly, downplayed or ignored outright by reformers pressing for changes to the

old system. Very likely, they supposed that any voter not intelligent enough to use a ballot ought not to have his voice counted at all. In lieu of actual literacy tests, the secret ballot could serve as a kind of de facto test to winnow out the inferior voter. Party organizers could not afford to be so sanguine about the new ballot's effects. The uncertainty introduced by the new ballot made the machine's strategy much more difficult. Even if mistakes were not enough to actually spoil the ballot, they could stymie the honest efforts of the loyal party voter to vote the way he was supposed to; hence the effort made by papers to guide voters through the process. Editors begged the voter to make but a single mark, inside the party circle. "To be sure that he is right a Republican should MAKE BUT ONE CROSS, but he must put that cross IN THE PROPER PLACE," read an editorial on Election Day in 1908. "Pay no attention whatever to any column upon the ballot except for the FIRST COLUMN. At the top of this FIRST COLUMN will be found the title—REPUBLICAN. Place the cross in the square to the right of that title. THAT IS ALL (capitals in original)."<sup>30</sup> Most years, the party paper could use the complicated nature of the ballot to its faction's advantage: "It is dangerous to split a ticket. The moment you do that you are obliged to make various crosses and you thus run the risk of losing your vote entirely because of errors."<sup>31</sup> In the case of intra-party fights, however, the argument was more delicate. For example, in 1912, *The Inquirer* editorialized that "since Money Bags Flinn has placed candidates for State Treasurer and Auditor General on the ticket who are no longer Republicans, there are unquestionably many Republicans who will not vote for

them. To vote against them the ticket must be cut.”<sup>31</sup> The paper then helpfully explained to its readers how to do just this.<sup>32</sup>

The obvious difficulties inherent in the new ballot system brought forth, in their turn, new sets of reforms. A short-ballot movement spread throughout the country: “[S]o big a ballot makes politics a field for experts only,” wrote the authors of a New York state pamphlet in 1914. Huge “ambush” ballots disenfranchised all busy citizens, leaving the professional politician in control of offices, the group argued, since it made the citizen rely blindly on party label for minor offices; a workable limit of the ballot was about five offices. The group recommended that the Governor’s office be responsible for filling other offices. This would make the citizen’s job much easier and, incidentally, take the choice of minor offices out of the hands of professional politicians and the public (where reformers did not have much influence, or success) and put it in the hands of the professional bureaucracy (where they had had considerably more).<sup>33</sup> Reformers also called for the introduction of non-partisan ballots, in which candidates for local offices were listed without party affiliation.<sup>34</sup>

The short-ballot reforms had some minor success (the non-partisan ballot existed in Pennsylvania only from 1913 to 1919.) But a better technological solution was waiting in the wings. That technology was the voting machine. The first ever documented use of a voting machine in the United States was in 1892, when residents of Lockport, NY, used a contraption invented by locksmith Jacob Myers. Voters

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<sup>31</sup> Republican State Senator William Flinn was a wealthy contractor and political boss from Pittsburgh who sometimes crossed swords with the Philadelphia machine and state boss Bois Penrose.



walked into a large, walk-in, metal room, about 10 feet square, and locked the doors behind them. They then punched a series of keys, which registered the vote on counters, and exited through a second set of doors.<sup>35</sup> Although expensive and unwieldy, the machines quickly spread in popularity. Four years later Myers would start his own company, the United States Voting Machine Co., and several other companies sprang up after the turn of the century, including the Shoup Corporation in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. That company and later groups began to produce the popular lever machine, which hid voters behind a curtain and registered votes with the pull of a large lever that moved interlocked rotary counters one-tenth of a turn. This was the machine that the City of Philadelphia introduced into its Election Day in the early 1930s.<sup>36</sup>

It was no accident that the introduction of the voting machine came hot on the heels of the new secret ballot. The machine was an elaboration and extension of the image of the American voter implied by the ballot: rational, individualist, and devoid of sectional, religious, or ethnic prejudice. It was also a solution to some of the problems that the secret ballot had introduced. Theoretically, it eliminated the possibility of spoiled ballots, since the machine lever would not operate if the voter had marked the ballot incorrectly. Voters could not put their crosses in the wrong circle, or fail to mark a square or circle correctly. While undervotes (that is, ballots cast in which not all offices were voted upon) were possible, overvotes (in which more than one candidate was voted for in a single office) were not.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps more important, the machine seemed to rule out at least certain forms of ballot corruption,

or at least make them far more difficult. The problem of forged ballots entering the booth was negated: since the machine did not use paper ballots, no phony ballots could be printed. It also seemed to make the manipulation of returns far more difficult. Humans only came in contact with the machine totals at the beginning of the day, when the totals were turned to zero, and at the closing of the polls, when the back of the machine was opened and the totals read. Hence, reformers could make certain that machine workers had not tampered with the vote totals by simply having a representative present when the machine was closed up in the morning and opened in the evening.<sup>38</sup>

In Philadelphia, the machine was put forward as a method of attacking the Organization and political corruption generally. The 1932 ballot contained a referendum question concerning the machines. The *Inquirer* and the *Bulletin*, which despite their consistent Republicanism had running battles against the Vare political machine of South Philadelphia, wrote election stories and editorials supporting the use of the machines, and using the opposition of “the organization” to the question as evidence that they would help in the fight against “Vareism” and the “contractor-combine” of South Philadelphia. “The voting machine tells the truth—records votes as cast,” read one editorial. “The paper ballot can be altered and false returns made.” It added that “every political corruptionist in the city will do his utmost to destroy this barrier to fraud.”<sup>39</sup> In a “news” story that essentially repeated verbatim a public statement from the Committee of Seventy supporting the machine, the paper wrote that the machines would make for speedier and more accurate returns and would

potentially save the city money in the long run.<sup>40</sup> The paper also warned readers that the Vare group had phrased the ballot questions in a deliberately confusing manner, so that voting “no” on the ballot actually meant retaining the machines.<sup>41</sup> When the voters of the city overwhelmingly supported the continued use of the machines the next day, *The Inquirer* reported that

“[t]he completely dominated organization wards were helpless to stem, with their comparatively small majorities, the crushing landslide of votes for the retention of the appliances with such superlative smoothness in yesterday’s heavy balloting.”<sup>42</sup>

Not everyone thought that the machines were entirely successful in defeating corruption, however. The same day’s issue of the *Inquirer* carried a charge by S. Davis Wilson, special counsel looking into election irregularities, that Republican party leaders in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie, and other cities had tampered with the machines so that they refused to register Democratic votes. The Republicans were able to do this, Davis charged, by the use of concealed rubber bands, buttons, and small pieces of metal.<sup>43</sup> There were other problems. Some people had trouble using the new devices.<sup>44</sup> The machine left no permanent mark of the voter’s intent, so there was no paper trail to follow in the event that the returns were disputed. Although reasonably accurate, the machines could not be made perfectly so: they could always be relied upon to make a certain percentage of mistakes. They were also unwieldy, and extremely expensive.<sup>45</sup>

Most of these problems were downplayed or ignored by the defenders of the machine, since its advantages over what had come before were so clear—if people had problem using the machines, then perhaps that was the fault of the voter, not the

technology.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, any potential disadvantages had to be weighed against the machines' advantages, and undoubtedly many of the claims that the pro-machine press made for the new technology were true. They did make corruption more difficult, if they did not eliminate it entirely. In fact, in terms of making it difficult to "fix" a vote, the Shoup machines were probably more effective than the later electronic and computerized systems that would replace them.<sup>47</sup>

What the machine also did was to cultivate a far different understanding of politics and of the political act of voting than the nineteenth century ballot had done. Unlike the act of voting in earlier times, voting with a machine did not serve as moment for the voter to distinguish himself (or now, herself) in any clear or obvious way from the rest of the public. The secret ballot celebrated the features that voters shared with one another—their equality, the freedom. The voter was no longer, at least not publicly, a Republican or a Democrat but simply a good American, a good citizen. Newspapers presented exemplary instances of voting. The day after Election Day, newspaper readers of the era were generally treated to stories like that of Ellis Curtin, a veteran of the "Immortal Light Brigade," dying of paralysis, who nevertheless took time to cast a vote.<sup>48</sup> Or a voter from Illinois who cast his 1920 vote for Harding in the same building that he had voted for Lincoln sixty years earlier.<sup>49</sup> The new exemplary voter was no longer one who voted the straight partisan line, but the man who reaffirmed the greatness of American democracy by participating in its central, legitimizing act.<sup>50</sup> Challenges to that new voter were going to be somewhat different than what they had been. There was no longer much danger in getting beaten up at the

polling booth, or having one's vote stolen by the Organization. Instead, a much different set of problems would come into play, ones that were linked with a much different image of the voting public, requiring a much different set of skills.

The evolving face of the voting public:

Women's role on Election Day began to change dramatically during this period, from their turn-of-the-century appearances in return crowds, to the moment in 1916, when suffragettes stood outside Philadelphia's polls passing out parallel lists of candidates listing which candidates had declared themselves for or against the suffrage cause. That year activists also had their own "election wire" to gather returns from across the country, especially with an eye toward women candidates—two women were running for Congress that year—and the suffrage cause.<sup>51</sup>

The Presidential election of 1920 was the first in the history of Philadelphia in which the woman residents of that city were legally allowed to go to the polls, the nineteenth amendment having been passed in August of that year.<sup>52</sup> In November, Election Day became a celebration of women's entry into public life, and the appearance of women at the polls was taken to cement their place in electorate. Alice Paul, national chairman of the Women's Party, was quoted in an Election Day story saying that, "[w]hen millions of women have cast their ballots at the polls, the amendment will be placed beyond all danger of legal attack." Mrs. Barclay H. Warburton, chairman of city's Republican women's committee, told reporters that she felt like a signer of the Declaration of Independence. "Thank offering" sentinels

parked themselves near polls, handing out pamphlets outlining the career of noted area suffragette Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, and requesting donations for endowed chairs at Bryn Mawr and the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Dr. Shaw's name. Women were reported to be taking home crayons and bits of paper from the polls as souvenirs.<sup>53</sup>

The final success of the women's rights champions was so overwhelming that it seemed to pull all partisan groups into a sort of larger social harmony. In the midst of battles between the Vare Brothers—leaders of South Philly's Republican "Organization"—and local reformist groups, and the bad blood created by a nasty campaign in the Presidential race, the issue of women's right to vote seemed to be something everyone could agree on.<sup>54</sup> Old enmities between "suffs" and "anti-suffs" disappeared. Leaders of the women's arms of both major parties worked together to cover milk bottles with red, white, and blue covers as a way of reminding women to vote. In Camden, female students from the Camden High School stationed themselves at polls canvass women voters over support of a bond issue concerning the Camden-Philadelphia bridge.<sup>55</sup>

The expansion of the suffrage to include women meant an arrival of the notion, if not the reality, of universal suffrage. Although some groups were still forbidden from voting, this fact was no longer the public issue that it had been with the suffragette movement and, to some extent, with the exclusion of blacks from the polls.<sup>56</sup> But the passage of the nineteenth amendment did not now mean that the voting public of the city, or the country, was equivalent to the adult population, for the

electorate began to shrink in other areas. In 1920, less than half the registered population cast a vote for President, a radical change in country where just twenty years before more than three quarters of eligible citizens had voted.<sup>57</sup> Although partisan papers still used their editorial pages to rally the troops on Election Day, in the twentieth century they also tended to emphasize the importance of simply voting.<sup>58</sup> Linked in many ways to evangelical movements like Prohibition, Progressives used the discourse of moral censure and stern advice. Non-voters were laggards, slackers. They needed to rouse themselves. “Don’t be a sluggard in politics,” blared an Election Day ad from the Bureau of Municipal Research. American democracy was a game at which everyone ought to participate. “Politics—professional politics—is a sport for the few. *Government* is a game which we all can play.”<sup>59</sup> Other suggestions were raised. A group of women touring the state for the League of Women Voters stressed the need to make voting simpler, in order to increase the presence at the polls. The League, and the women’s arms of the political parties, were especially active on Election Day, driving women to the polls.<sup>60</sup>

Along with the question of the vitality of Philadelphia’s voting public—signaled by worries over turnout—came the question of its wisdom. If the central issue of Election Day was a question of obtaining the best information at one’s disposable and applying it correctly, then it was a question of technique. There were better and worse answers. Candidates won through non-partisan appeals. Experts were central. Given the demands made upon the lonely figure of the individual voter, the dangers she had to navigate in order to perform her proper duty at the polls, it was natural that

the Election Day performance provoked worries. In the early 1920s, Walter Lippman famously raised doubts about the ability of the modern citizen to accomplish his or her duties. Although Lippman's thesis was broader than the question of voting, it was clearly pertinent to that event. Could the voter be trusted to choose the correct candidate, given the rather sporadic attention she paid to politics?<sup>61</sup>

Theories of propaganda, and worries about the persuasive effects of the new forms of the mass media, raised further fears about the ability of manipulative politicians to steer the public away from its proper course.<sup>62</sup> If changes to Election Day were making it more and more difficult for the opponent to cheat through bribery, etc. then the new danger was that he would distort the voter's reason was through honeyed words and illusion. In 1932, the *Inquirer* compared the facts and the careful arguments of Hoover with the empty phrases of Roosevelt, and the latter's concepts like "a new deal," which defied analysis. Roosevelt's campaign performances were merely "fiery rockets flashing across the sky," "the painting of a beautiful aurora borealis, without substance," "a display of oratorical pinwheels, brilliant to the eye, but meaningless." The paper warned that the situation was too serious to prefer a candidate because "he smiles at us and entertains us,"<sup>63</sup> and the day after the election, its editors grumbled that "there has been far less serious thinking in this campaign than there should have been."<sup>64</sup>

The answer to the problem was information. The Progressive voter relied upon facts, upon information gleaned through the mass media in the course of the campaign. Her role would henceforth be to judge to facts, to weigh them, to sift through them and



compare them with each other. In the Sunday before 1928's Election Day, the *Inquirer* told its readers that Sunday morning was a good time to give serious consideration to the issues.<sup>65</sup> The decision as to which candidate was best for the country could be arrived at through dedication and application of "common-sense." The preferred candidate was thus the candidate of non-partisanship, of simple reason. (In the pages of the *Inquirer*, that candidate was of course the Republican one).<sup>66</sup> Intelligence was key. Labor was "too intelligent" to vote for the likes of radicals like Bryan and La Follette. In 1920, after the landslide victory of Harding, *Inquirer* editors pooh-poohed the notion that "the labor vote" could be delivered en masse. Samuel Gumpers and his ilk might meet and issue orders, but when the working man entered the voting booth he was an individual, beyond the reach of the labor bosses. Then, they used their intelligence and reason to choose what was best for themselves and the country. The individual's good sense triumphed over group biases.<sup>67</sup>

There is a link between worries over the intelligence of the voting public and the disturbing trend of declining voter turnout, one never directly mentioned in the calls to vote. As McGerr has pointed out, one of the reasons that many reformers and social scientists were so disturbed about the voting rate is that they thought that the non-voters were more likely than not to be stable and well-educated businessmen or professionals. They feared that the modern public was biased toward the menial laborer, the immigrant, the voter more likely to be under the control of the machine.<sup>68</sup> That this suspected vision of the voting public was nearly the exact opposite of what social scientists were finding—it was the less well-to-do, the less settled, the working

classes, who were dropping from the voting rolls—should not be surprising. After all, it was getting hard to gain a very clear picture of the voting public on Election Day anymore. Much of the action of the day had removed to other spaces, or other points in time. Election Day was becoming a day when less and less seemed to be going on.

Election night in progressive America:

The Election night spectacle continued throughout early twentieth century Philadelphia, centering now more and more on the newspaper. Newsboys would hawk Election Day extras announcing the winner by as early as nine o'clock, loudspeakers and later electronic billboards blared forth returns. Newspapers like the *Inquirer*, *The Press*, and the *Evening Bulletin* continued to provide entertainment and fireworks outside their buildings for crowds awaiting national returns, with a quartet that led the crowd in the singing of patriotic anthems like, "My Country 'Tis of Thee," or vaudeville entertainments and mime skits. Every Presidential Election night in the early twentieth century outside the paper's building featured moving pictures, which gradually became more sophisticated with time. The announcement of a Presidential victory would produce pictures of the new President and Vice President upon the screens.<sup>69</sup> Then cannons from the roof of the newspaper building would begin to boom. Following the announcement of Harding's victory in 1920, *The Inquirer* was so excited to see a Republican in the White House after eight years of Democratic control that the cannons fired repeatedly until, a reporter wrote, the metal began to glow.<sup>70</sup>

Since part of what allowed the nation to celebrate itself every four years was the new communication technology that brought it closer and closer together, Election Day as celebration of the nation also became a celebration of that technology. In the early days of moving pictures, the *Inquirer* would trumpet the wonders of the “stereopticon.”<sup>71</sup> New technologies brought new wonders. In 1908 *The Evening Bulletin*, whose offices lay just next to city hall, announced the introduction of the “telautoscope” for delivering the returns. Viewers would see a white light flashed on the screen, and then within that light, a giant shadowy pen that would start noting down return figures.<sup>72</sup> In 1912, the assembled crowd before the *Inquirer* people was told to hold still for a moment while its picture was taken. A light flashed, and an hour later the photo was shone on the large white screen used for displaying returns. The crowd cheered this wonder of photography, the most dramatic and explicit method yet of the body politic watching itself on Election night.<sup>73</sup> In 1920, a huge searchlight, operated by Army engineers, filled the skies over the city. At scheduled periods, the light would move back and forth across the sky in order to provide residents with returns from the most doubtful states: 9:15 for Maine, 9:30 for New York, and so on. A North-South movement meant that Republicans had taken the state, a East-West movement meant a Democratic victory, and no movement at all meant the state was still too close to call.<sup>74</sup> The telephone and the telegraph provided greater wonders yet. In 1924, the *Inquirer* noted that returns from California had moved across the country more quickly than a man could have saddled a horse in Washington’s day.<sup>75</sup>

But even as the technology behind the Election night spectacular grew ever more impressive, the crowds for such events were getting smaller. People increasingly were doing their celebrating in segregated spaces—hotel restaurants, cafes, theaters. City restaurants like Reuben's or Golden Gate, and the Food Fair commercial museum promised their Election night patrons that Election returns would be broadcast throughout the evening. Theaters announced that they would deliver returns in the intermissions of their productions.<sup>76</sup> By 1932, the *Inquirer* gave up on moving pictures and return screens, choosing instead to emphasize its radio production, its telephone service, and its Election night Extra editions. Visitors to the newspaper's office were promised mere loudspeakers, blaring out the radio broadcast into the street.<sup>77</sup>

Ironically, some of the same communication technologies that were bringing the nation into a single national picture on Election night were allowing the local celebrants themselves to experience Election night apart from each other. One of these technologies was the telephone: a service for obtaining results by telephone was already in place by the 1908.<sup>78</sup> These services became increasingly sophisticated in the years to come, as papers like the *Inquirer* hired upwards of 100 extra operators for the night and began to use a special phone line to distribute returns; its Election Day edition made a point of telling readers how to dial the special number for returns and warning them not to phone the paper's regular number.<sup>79</sup> By the 1920, thousands of people were receiving their Election night news via the paper's phone service, rather than heading down to the corner of Market and Eleventh streets in order to push and

struggle against the center city crowds.<sup>80</sup> Citizens could now learn the contours of the political nation without ever leaving their homes.

Radio accelerated the move into the private space of the citizen's home. The influence of that new medium spread even more rapidly and thoroughly than did the telephone. In 1924, Democratic John Davis became the first ever presidential candidate to use an electronic mass medium to transmit his Election Eve appeal to voters, thereby beginning an American political tradition.<sup>81</sup> That same year, stations in Philadelphia and throughout the eastern seaboard held Election night specials that featured interspersed news of returns with music and other popular entertainment. One station, WIP, announced in 1924 that it would broadcast its special from within the confines of the venerable Union League, and hinted at commentary from various league members, such as former Republican governors Stuart and Smith.<sup>82</sup> In 1940, the same station hooked up with Bob Vale, editor of the *Daily News*, for an election night analysis.<sup>83</sup>

Although the segregation of the Election night celebration had started long before the introduction of radio, this new medium did make such segregation easier, by making it more attractive. Even more than the telephone, radio was able to ape the style of the public celebration of Election night. Specials became ever more elaborate, as stations added commentary, music and vaudeville acts to their programming. In 1928, a special produced by Warner Brothers featured an array of Broadway stars.<sup>84</sup>

And yet, despite the flagging health of the newspaper's return spectacle, the public celebration of the vote did not disappear in the Progressive era. Reversing their

laggard behavior of four years earlier, upwards of 1,000 Union League members marched down Broad Street for Herbert Hoover in 1928, following the announcement of his landslide win over Al Smith. They carried a banner reading, "Love of Country wins," and waved American flags.<sup>85</sup> Earlier that evening, promising returns from urban centers in the east had sent Smith supporters outside droves to cheer for their man. Groups of disheveled young men carrying pictures of Smith walked up and down the street, or yelled out the windows of cars, their windshields plastered with Democratic posters. Along South Broad Street, between City Hall and Walnut, the two headquarters of the Hoover and Smith campaigns blared returns at each other with competing loudspeakers.<sup>86</sup> In 1932, a group of Democratic loyalists went to the home of Republican boss William Vare with a brass band and sang patriotic songs outside the residence. Another group marched down Broad Street with brooms, shouting, "a new broom sweeps clean." Celebrants at the headquarters of the women's branch of the party sang "Happy Days are here again."<sup>87</sup> Similar scenes of bedlam were enacted four years later, when a horse drawn wagon covered with Roosevelt banners, and 150 "Roosevelt Couriers" (a group of young women supporting the President's re-election) marched through the streets of Center City.<sup>88</sup> In 1940, the city's Republican campaign chairman Robert T. McCracken was quoted as saying that only "paupers" voted for Roosevelt. That remark, which national Republican leaders tried unsuccessfully to ignore, brought a brisk business in "Paupers for Roosevelt" buttons on Election night.<sup>89</sup>

These Election night revels were different from their nineteenth century predecessors. They were, in the first place, considerably less dangerous. Only six fires were reported in Center City on Election night, 1932, and only one serious incident occurred, when sparks from a fire lit up a room in brewery. (More of a nuisance than the fires themselves were alarms for non-existent or minor fires that sent fire companies chasing through the city and cost the city almost \$7,000 for the evening.)<sup>90</sup> Although there was some bitterness in the air—Democrats jeered Republicans in the street, and the leader of the G.O.P. women’s auxiliary snapped that Republicans who had voted for Roosevelt “should be run out of the city,” there were no knifings, no gun shots.<sup>91</sup> The numerous police officers sent to keep a watch on the crowds had little to do but try to direct traffic through the tie-ups enveloping the downtown core. “The attitude of the celebrants was the good-natured attitude of the average American citizen who has achieved his particular ideal.” To the extent that there was anger among the population, it came not from political fights but from frustrated motorists unable to get through the crowds.<sup>92</sup>

The reason behind the celebration was also much different now. In the nineteenth century, men had come to the center of the city because this was the quickest way to get a clear idea of how the race was going. Now, the downtown party became, almost exclusively, a celebration of the victory, an expression of public joy. It was also a celebration of the distinctiveness, not of this or that group within the nation, but of the nation itself. Mass media at the time carried reports of changes in European governments, of the rise of fascism and communist dictatorships. By the very fact of

the celebration, Americans told themselves that they were different from this. Election Day was what helped define them against the threatening ideological clouds abroad.<sup>93</sup>

The Election night of 1940 illustrates this perhaps better than any other. For over 75 years, the headquarters of the Union League, on Broad Street, a block and a half away from City Hall, had been the home of Philadelphia's Republican leadership. Given the dominance of that party in both Pennsylvania and Philadelphia for most of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, the clubhouse also became the center of Philadelphia political life, and a major shrine on Election night, especially on those occasions when Republican's were able to announce victory in the gubernatorial, mayoral, and presidential races.<sup>94</sup>

The symbolic importance of the Union League made it ripe for mockery and derision when the Democrats, under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, finally did manage to break the G.O.P.'s stranglehold on the city and on the national consensus. In 1932, long-suffering Democrats went nearly delirious with Roosevelt's victory, and the logical spot to vent their spirits was in front of the citadel of power and arrogance that had too long presumed to rule over them. They marched up to the doors of the Union League, twice. Early in the evening, they carried a stuffed toy donkey wearing a high hat before the clubhouse. Then at 11 pm, about 1,000 Roosevelt supporters serenaded club members with Bronx cheers and threatened to break its doors down.<sup>95</sup> Again in 1936, crowds of Democratic supporters stormed the League steps and nearly threatened to break its doors down, while the club's members sullenly sat inside and



stewed about their loss of power. Eventually fed up with the public humiliation entailed by such a scene, they ended up calling on police to disperse the crowds.<sup>96</sup>

By 1940, the League's membership had not needed to make an Election night parade down Broad for over a decade, and it was clear that this year would be no different. Polls had given President Roosevelt a clear lead over his Republican challenger, Wendell Wilkie. In his Election eve radio Monday night, a time in which the candidate normally exhorted his supporters to get to the polls, Wilkie sounded almost as though he were already conceding the race. He called on Americans to rally around whoever won the Presidency, no matter how bitter they might feel after the election. "People of America," Wilkie said, "I want to end this campaign without bitterness. There had been no bitterness in my heart, and there is none now."<sup>97</sup> Perhaps this is why, according to *Inquirer* reporter R.E.S. Thompson, the League members took the loss on Tuesday night much better than they had on previous occasions. Once Roosevelt's victory was clear, they moved out to the clubhouse balconies. Under the red, white and blue lights spelling out Willkie and McNary, and the legend, "Love of Country Leads," they started to joke and speak to the Democratic throng assembled below.<sup>98</sup>

One league matron, moving down the clubhouse steps and home, ran into a group of young men with their arms around each other, enjoying the evening. The woman was wearing a mink coat, an orchard, and a Wilkie button. The young men sported a "We told you so" banner across their chests. "The matron looked rattled and

stood stock still,” wrote Thompson. Then one of the youths threw an arm around her and said: “we love you anyway, lady.”

Her face was a blank for a second. Then she smiled, then she laughed. She got hold of herself and answered:  
“That’s swell. I’m for you, too.”<sup>99</sup>

Even Republican reporters seemed transfixed by the events of Election night, 1940, as men and women poured off of trains from surrounding areas and into the city’s streets. Estimates from police put the total at around 250,000, greater than New Year’s eve, or even Mummers Parade crowds. Without the slightest evidence of malice or ill-feeling, they walked through downtown in celebration of Roosevelt’s election. Police remarked upon the unusually happy mood of the crowd. “It was almost tangible—not merely good nature, but an evident desire to let bygones be bygones, and to pursue a new unity in the face of outward challenge.” A union band leading the first Democratic victory parade up Broad Street halted in front of the Union League and played the “Star Spangled Banner,” while thousands of celebrants removed their hats, and sudden, spine-tingling silence crept through the massed ranks.<sup>100</sup>

#### The enemies of the public:

Election Day in Philadelphia was a less violently partisan one in the twentieth century than it had been in the nineteenth. Philadelphians of all political stripes seemed to be comfortable with the idea that members of the opposition were also good Americans, that some larger sets of principles were accepted by members of all political stripes, that there was something that linked Americans as Americans.

Election Day was still a moment of partisanship, it would inevitably be that, but this partisanship was no longer threatening. Increasingly, Election Day was able to accomplish the difficult task of embodying mild partisan differences wrapped in a larger, unified national community.

To the extent that Election Day provided an image of the enemy, this enemy was increasingly conceived along lines other than strictly party ones. On the one hand, there was the shadowy figure of the boss. Philadelphia was of course suffused by machine politics in this era, but often it became useful to rally Election Day troops by referring to a particular boss, and a particular threat: the “organization” of South Philadelphia State Senator William Vare and his older brothers. Vare was a useful Election Day villain because he was also a number of things that the Progressive citizen was not: working class (Vare had been a contractor before he entered politics), vulgar, corrupt, comfortable with physical coercion at the polls.<sup>101</sup> Editorials were printed against “Vareism” and corruption. “The old machine is still powerful, but it can and should be smashed today,” the *Inquirer* wrote one Election Day.<sup>102</sup> The next day, it blamed the defeat of a loan bill, which the editorial staff had favored, on the “Vare combine forces.”<sup>103</sup> The other useful opponent on the Progressive Election Day was the radical, the socialist. In 1924, the *Inquirer* spent far more effort attacking third party candidate Bob La Follette than it did on the Democratic nominee John Davis. It urged readers to overthrow the “American menace,” represented by La Follette and socialist leader Eugene Debs.<sup>104</sup>

By the 1932 election, however, these “dangerous” ideas had migrated to a much more impressive figure, the Democratic Presidential candidate himself. Philadelphia’s largely Republican media spent much of their campaign copy in the 1930s attacking F.D.R. and his “dangerous” and foreign ideas, comparing him to communists, fascists, and dictators generally. Here is one example:

Citizens:

Today is YOUR day.  
Today, YOU have the opportunity to do YOUR part in saving America.  
Don’t neglect this priceless opportunity.  
YOUR vote is needed in the great battle of the ballots fought in this country today to drive from the seat of American Government the subversive doctrines and dogmas of the un-American New Deal.<sup>105</sup>

“We Don’t Want This Country to Ape Soviet Russia: Vote to Save America!” screamed another front page editorial the Saturday before the 1936 vote. A cartoon showed a battered Uncle Sam with his arms around “the American Voter,” saying it was “all up to you” to save the American form of government from “alien ideas.” A front page ad asked, “WHO IS THE MASTER IN AMERICA: FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT OR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.” Ads were also run “warning” voters on relief that WPA bureaucrats would attempt to illegally force them to support Roosevelt.<sup>106</sup> In turn, the *Record*, Philadelphia’s only major Democratic paper at the time, went after Roosevelt’s opponents as “Economic Royalists.”<sup>107</sup> Anti-Roosevelt hysteria was the result of “wormwood and gall.”<sup>108</sup> Jack Kelly, the leader of the city’s Democratic forces, uncovered a plot in which phony Republican machine inspectors were to head into largely Democratic districts and hold up the count with

fake “inspections.”<sup>109</sup> If the Republicans charged FDR with being some sort of political Svengali intent on seducing and corrupting the public, the *Record* used another charge that would become increasingly familiar in the twentieth century: the media conspiracy. The campaign had not been a fair one, because the country’s media were in the pay of the G.O.P., the paper argued, and had presented only one side.<sup>110</sup>

Although it had added some features, the Election Day debate within Philadelphia’s city papers during the Roosevelt years also had something of the past in it. Old tropes reappeared—the desire to link the opponent with a foreign power in order to discredit him, the label of “aristocracy.” This style of debate, this aspect of the Election Day ritual, moved the discussion away from a focus on shadowy opponents outside the party system, and brought it back into the voting public itself. This feature was of a piece of the revival of the Election Day celebration more generally, during the same period. The celebration and the contest were elements of one and the same event.

#### Conclusion:

The experience of voting in Philadelphia in the first four decades of the twentieth century was no longer a very effective method for members of the public to declare any form of social particularity, as it had been in the nineteenth century. As a result first of the secret ballot, and then the introduction of the voting machine, voting now served simply to mark one’s membership in the American public. That group was marked off by its distinction from illegitimate members of the body politic like the

city's machine, and foreign elements like fascism and socialism. It was also distinguished simply through the fact that it was not part of that increasingly large number of "slackers" who chose not to go to the polls on Election Day. What might have served to define this latter group from citizens who did vote was never made clear in public discourse. They were a puzzle, a problem. Perhaps they simply lacked civic enthusiasm, or did not understand the importance of voting. Newspapers attempted to rectify the problem by harping upon the duty of the citizen, and the central role that voting played in democratic life.

If the vote itself became less of a public event, so too did the Election night celebration. Introductions of new technology allowed members of the public to segregate themselves into smaller spaces—bars and restaurants—or to stay home altogether. To the extent that the physical congregation of citizens in the center of the city had served to communicate some idea of the public to itself, then that message was increasingly lost. Significantly, the decline of Election night bonfires, a symbol of the city's younger residents of the excitement that the election had produced, disappeared not with their formal banning, but with the decline of the Election night crowd.

This change did not come about in a vacuum. It was part and parcel of a number of other shifts in the way that democratic citizenship was conceived, in the way that the public was configured as a political entity, the place of partisanship in American democracy, and the notion of what purpose electoral politics served.<sup>111</sup> As politics became more a matter of technique, a process of simply determining, through

the proper use of social knowledge, the proper course for the polity, the construction of what an Election Day was good for changed as well.

The exception to this argument seems to be the decade of the 1930s. Roosevelt's policies were a direct attack on the political consensus that had developed over the previous twenty years. As a result, the attacks in Philadelphia's Republican press were more strident, as was his defense in the city's democratic mouthpiece, the *Record*. Opponents were more likely to identify Roosevelt with groups outside the legitimate body politic, with "foreign" ideas from communist Russia. Reports of violence and corruption, on the part not of the machine but of the partisan opposition, were raised in the partisan press. The Election night celebration also made a comeback, as Democrats gathered in public to cheer the success of their candidate, and also the victory he represented for them over the city's social and financial elite.

Part of the dynamic of the Election Day is the movement to bind the together what had been torn apart. An Election Day celebration that focuses overmuch on what makes the members of the polity similar, a celebration that marks the victory over an opponent who is not in the end so very different than myself, is one that lacks drama. Philadelphians in the 1930s did not have that problem. Popular discourse clearly perceived the differences between FDR and his Republican opponents, and the Election Day rhetoric from the newspapers probably strikes the modern ear as somewhat hysterical, even demagogic. But at least when the citizens went out to celebrate the day, they were celebrating the healing of a real breach that had occurred. And they could point to this very act of overcoming that division as the feature that

defined them against the foreign challenge. In doing so, they were able to draw on a set of cultural practices that were still near enough to serve the purpose of illustrating that fact to themselves. But as the city and the nation moved farther from the political culture of the nineteenth century, those practices would eventually be lost.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Walter Dean Burnham, "The system of 1896: an analysis," in *The Evolution of American electoral systems*, Paul Kleppner, et al, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981) p. 193, Table 5.9.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Chubb, "Party collations in the early twentieth century" in *Party coalitions in the 1980s*, Lipset, ed., pp. 107-126.

<sup>3</sup> McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, pp. 138-193; Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," pp. 18-26; Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, pp. 99-100; Schudson, *Good citizen*, pp. 192-202.

<sup>4</sup> Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," pp. 24, 25; Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, pp. 103-105. Richard Jensen, "Armies, admen, and crusaders: types of presidential election campaigns," *History Teacher*, 2 (1969): 33-50.

<sup>5</sup> Schudson, *The good citizen*, pp. 184, 185.

<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of struggle: the woman's rights movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1975 [1959]) pp. 300-317;

<sup>7</sup> Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Gosnell, *Non-voting: causes and methods of control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924)

<sup>8</sup> McCaffery, *When bosses ruled*, pp. 161-188, 127-128. For attacks on the machine in the Philadelphia press, see *Press*, Nov. 5, 1900, pp. 1, 5; *Record*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 7; *Inquirer*, Nov. 1, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 22, 1936, p. 17 (hereafter referred to as *Daily News*).

<sup>10</sup> *Inquirer*, Oct. 31, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *The Philadelphia Record*, Nov. 3, 1936, p. 12 (hereafter referred to as *Record*).

<sup>12</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1896, p. 3. For a similar account of Taft's and Bryan's days at the polls, see *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 3. The front page of the *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1904, pictured Uncle Sam spread across the top of the page. On Nov. 4, 1908, the front page announcing Taft's victory showed an elephant astride an American eagle.

<sup>13</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Stories about police and "burly Negroes" intimidating opponents of the Republican machine can be found in *Press*, Nov. 6, 1900, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1904, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1908, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Press*, Nov. 8, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Numbers about additional police officers are in *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1912, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1912, p. 4

<sup>22</sup> *Press*, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 1

<sup>23</sup> *Daily News*, Nov. 3, 1936, p. 8

<sup>24</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Harris, *Election Administration in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brooking's Inst., 1934) pp. 322-340; J. T. Salter, *Boss rule: portraits in city politics* (New York: Arno Press, 1974[1935]), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Ronnie Dugger, "Annals in democracy: counting votes," *New Yorker*, Nov. 7, 1988, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> Difficulties in Ohio and Massachusetts are noted in *The Inquirer*, Nov. 10, 1892, p. 4, as a way of favorably contrasting the Pennsylvania experience. The paper noted that the new ballot made "a severer



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test of the intelligence of the voter than the ballot of any other state," and argued that relative lack of spoiled balance argued for a general intelligence on behalf of the Pennsylvania electorate (its later stories suggest that the faith in the intelligence of the Pennsylvania voter was less than secure on the part of the paper's editors).

<sup>28</sup> A copy of the 1896 ticket can be found *Inquirer*, Nov. 1, 1896, p.13, second section.

<sup>29</sup> Stories on the big ballots slowing down elections are in *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 1, *Bulletin*, Nov. 7, 1916, p. 2, and *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1912, p. 2. An editorial in the *Press*, Nov. 6, 1912, p. 8, rails against the ballots and argues that something be done, but Fredman, *The Australian ballot*, suggests that "in many states, the large and cumbersome blanket ballot is deliberately designed to encourage heedless party conformity," p. 123.

<sup>30</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1908, p. 2. Similar stories appear in *Press*, Nov. 8, 1904, p. 2; *Press*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 2; and *Record*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1912, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> The New York Short Ballot Organization, *The Short Ballot in the State of New York* (The NY Short Ballot Org.: New York, 1914) pp. 3, 4. See also the 1912 editorial against the large ballot in *The Press*, *op cit*. The same paper printed mocking the large ballot, *The Press*, Nov. 4, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> J.T. Salter, *The non-partisan ballot in certain Pennsylvania cities*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Philadelphia, 1928.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick E. Allen, "Behind the cutting edge: the voting machine problem," *American Heritage*, April, 2001, p. 39 Cullen Murphy, "Big business in ballots," *Atlantic Monthly*, November, 1984, p. 22. An Minnesota inventor seems to have come up with a machine even before Myers, but the "Rhine voting machine" seems never to have been actually used, Wigmore, *Australian ballot system*, p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> Ronnie Dugger, "Annals of Democracy: counting votes," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 7, 1988, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 41; also Murphy, "Big business," pp. 22, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1932, p. 22

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1932, p.11, section 2, where an editorial suggests that the question on the ballot was deliberately designed to mislead voters.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 1. See also an editorial in *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 4. It is not clear how powerful the organization's opposition was to the machines, since even those voters in Vare stronghold supported the machines. In part, their opposition may have been exaggerated in order to drum up support for the new technology.

<sup>43</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 9. However, on Election Day itself, the *Daily News*, which favored the machines, wrote a story about how smoothly they were working, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> More general problems with the lever machine are raised in Murphy, "Big business in ballots," p. 23; Dugger, "Annals of democracy," pp. 46, 47.

<sup>46</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Dugger, "Annals of democracy," pp. 51-108.

<sup>48</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1924, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1920, p. 2;

<sup>50</sup> For stories celebrating voters at the time see *The Press*, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 5; and a Ripley's cartoon in *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of struggle: the woman's rights movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press (Harvard University), 1975[1959]), pp. 300-317.

<sup>53</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 1, 1920, p. 5, re: the thank you sentinels for Dr. Shaw. Alice Paul is quoted in *ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1920, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1920, p. 2,

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1920, p. 10.

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<sup>56</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Ballot Act of 1893*, Section 14. The outline of voter qualifications noted that Tribal Indians were not considered citizens, therefore not allowed to vote. The formal justification here seems to have been based on the question of the payment of taxes, rather than race (since Tribal Indians did not pay taxes they were not considered to have a voice in the government.) Naturalized citizens were allowed to vote, if they were free white citizens or aliens of "African nativity or African descent." Naturalized Chinese were explicitly, and naturalized citizens from other Asian groups implicitly, barred from voting. See also Brinley, *A Handbook for Philadelphia Voters*, p. 13. Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, gives a narrative of the general trend toward taking down restrictions on non-white voters in the twentieth century, pp. 244 ff. Changes to Philadelphia's laws seem to predate many western states. See the qualifications for voters in the 1937 Election Act. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Pennsylvania Election Code*. 1937, Article VII, section 701.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1924, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Pro-voting editorials are in *Bulletin*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 8; and one in *Record*, Nov. 3, 1936, calling the ballot a "sacred right," p. 12. A poetic paen to the vote was published on the front page of the Election Day edition of *Press*, Nov. 8, 1904.

<sup>59</sup> See the advertisement from the Bureau of Municipal Research, in *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1920, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1924, p. 12, and Nov. 2, 1924, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, is essentially a book-length warning about the dangers of propaganda. See esp., pp. 234-249.

<sup>62</sup> One of the well-known empirical researchers into the question of propaganda and the mass media was Harold Laswell, see for example *Propaganda technique in the world war* (New York: D. Smith, 1938). For a historical account of the dominance that the concept of propaganda held in the study of public opinion and mass mediated communication, see Kenneth Cmiel, "On cynicism, evil, and the discovery of communication in the 1940s," *Journal of Communication*, 46.3 (1996).

<sup>63</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1928, p. 12

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1924, p. 12

<sup>67</sup> See anti-La Follette editorials in *Inquirer*, Nov., 8, 1908, p. 8; and Nov. 6, 1924, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> McGerr, *Decline of popular politics*, pp. 196-209.

<sup>69</sup> Accounts of Election night celebrations can be found in the *Press*, Nov. 6, 1900, p. 5; and Nov. 5, 1912, p. 1. *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1904, p. 2; Nov. 4, 1908, p. 1, Nov. 6, 1912, p. 1, and Nov. 7, 1928, p. 4. The *Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1940, p. 16, reported on the wonders of that paper's Election night celebrations, including the use of "Chinese crayons" to provide additional color to the evening.

<sup>70</sup> The description of *Inquirer* cannons announcing the Republican Presidential victory is in *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1920, p. 2. *Record*, a Democratic paper, also used a cannon to declare Roosevelt's victory in 1936, booming confetti out into the street, *Record*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1900, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1908, p. 8. A day earlier, the paper shanghaied the mayor into extolling its Election Night facilities. *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1908, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1908, edition, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> The information concerning the Army's searchlight is from the *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1920, p. 9;

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1924, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Advertisements for returns at the new Hotel Ridgeway in Camden are in *Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1912, p. 9; the same page features an ad for the New York News Bureau, whose returns were featured in "all the 1<sup>st</sup> class saloons." Similar advertisements for Reubens, The Golden Gate, and the Food Fair commercial museum are in *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1928, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> The newer, stripped-down version of the *Inquirer's* return service is given in *ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 1. Other papers continued with a more elaborate effort, however: see *Daily News*, Nov. 6, 1932, p. 2, showing a large crowd around the "News" building. Also the description of the *Evening Bulletin's* elaborate outdoor shows as late as 1944: *Bulletin*, Nov. 6, 1944, p. 3. By this time, however,

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newspapers seem to have dispensed with entertainment, and promoted the speed, accuracy, and completeness of their returns.

<sup>78</sup> See *ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1908, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> In 1944, *The Bulletin* advertised the use of its "flashcast" bulletin boards at three different spots in the city to broadcast returns. *Bulletin*, Nov. 6, 1944, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1924, p. 6, mentions Davis' radio appeal.

<sup>82</sup> The information on the special features of various Election night stations can be found in broadcast highlights in *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1924, p. 21, and *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1932, 16.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily News*, Nov. 5, 1940, p. 25 carries the stories of Vale's WIP appearance. Thomas W. Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1916-1948," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 12.3 1968, pp. 267-285, gives a general history of radio's use on Election night. Reports of Election eve appeals, via television, are in Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency: a history and criticism of presidential campaign advertising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 87-88, 270-275.

<sup>84</sup> The Broadway stars are mentioned in an advertisement for Warner Brothers' Election night show on WFAN, *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1928;

<sup>85</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1928, p. 19. The article claimed that the city was "thronged" with celebrants, red fire, automobile horns, whistles, drums, and human voices. The tradition of the Union League marching down Broad to celebrate a Republican presidential win seems to have started in 1904: *Press*, Nov. 9, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1928, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 2; and *Daily News*, Nov. 8, 1932, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Daily News*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> *Record*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 2;

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, *Daily News*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> See editorials and cartoons in *Bulletin*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 8; *Daily News*, Oct. 22, 1936, p. 17; and *Record*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 1, celebrating "the real dictators of their country," i.e., the voters.

<sup>94</sup> For a history of the Union League see Maxwell Whiteman, *Gentlemen in crisis: the first century of the Union League in Philadelphia, 1862-1962* (Philadelphia: The League, 1975)

<sup>95</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 1; *Bulletin*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 1; and *Daily News*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 13; a more gleeful account is found in the *Democratic Record*, Nov. 4, 1936, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Wilkie's address is in *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> R.E.S. Thompson, "No Bitterness was here: Union League Members Joke with Happy Crowds," *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* In the equally Republican *Daily News*, reporter Julia Showell portrayed a similar scene. Showell heard in the "human ringing in a million throats," the same message of freedom and liberty that Philadelphians had heard almost two hundred years earlier, when a cracked liberty bell" and rung out a new world and a newborn republic. Julia Showell, "F.R. friends, foes here unite in liberty paen," *The Daily News*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 1; *Daily News*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 2; *Record*, Nov. 6, 1940 pp. 1, 3,

<sup>101</sup> Cortelyou's discovery of the "plot to steal the election" is in *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> The editorials against Vare are in *ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1920, p. 12 and Nov. 2, 1920, p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> For critical assessments of the Vare regime, and the negative effects it had on the city of Philadelphia, see McCaffery, *When bosses ruled Philadelphia*, pp. 190, 191, and Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in three periods of its growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1968), pp. 219-220. Even Lukacs, generally more sympathetic to machine politicians than most earlier historians, seems to make an exception for the Vares, calling William Vare "corrupt," and the Vare brothers' corruption "infamous:" see *Philadelphia: patricians and philistines*, pp. 71, 225. Vare's side of the story can be found in *My Forty Years in Politics* (Philadelphia: Roland Swain Co.: 1933).

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<sup>104</sup> See editorials against La Follette in *Inquirer.*, Nov. 1, 1924, p. 12; Nov. 3, 1924, p. 12 Nov. 4, 1924, p. 12; and finally Nov. 6, 1924, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> The anti-FDR editorial is in *Inquirer*, Nov. 1, 1936, p. 1, third section; see also one in the *Daily News*, Oct. 22, 1936, p. 17, comparing the President to a communist.

<sup>106</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 17; also the cartoon in *Daily News*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 17; an example of the WPA ad is in *Daily News*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 15.

<sup>107</sup> *Record*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1936, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1936, p. 12.

<sup>111</sup> Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," pp. 25-27.

## **Chapter Eight: Election Day in the Television Age**

Four years after the 1940 celebration that so charmed Philadelphia's journalists, the city's streets lay mostly quiet on Election night. Although newspaper reports noted a noisy crowd of some 50,000 in New York City's Times Square cheering returns that gave Franklin Roosevelt a record fourth term, in Philadelphia people watched the electronic billboards and listened to the blaring megaphones without comment. The next day, reporters credited the sober response to the ongoing war effort—Philadelphia, like the rest of the country, was involved in a more serious battle than the one taking place between Republicans and Democrats.<sup>1</sup> Yet in 1948, more than three years after World War II was ended, the celebration was quieter yet. Day-after stories noted, with a mixture of something like amazement and dismay, that the city's streets were deserted. Owners of downtown drinking and eating establishments were despondent—Election night was one of the most important of the year, and the loss in expected revenue would be hard to take.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Philadelphia's Election Day celebration shrank so much in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that by the end it was just about big enough to fit into an electronic screen, 17 square inches large. Television stations first began widespread broadcasting of Election night returns to Philadelphians in 1948. That year, the *Inquirer* and television station WFIL joined together to present viewers with a night-time's worth of numbers and commentators. The broadcast was from the paper's city desk, and featured *Inquirer* reporters as expert analysts, with chalkboards in the background that listed running totals.<sup>3</sup> Within ten years, the major networks had

brought in huge computers that allowed them to predict Presidential victories by the early evening, making other sources of Election night coverage redundant.<sup>4</sup> By 1968, most Americans were getting their Election night returns from television. Newspapers gave day after analysis and were used by some for supplementary information. Radio had virtually ceased to be a source of information about returns.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will mostly be about television, since it is through television that Philadelphians and other Americans increasingly experienced the national ritual of Election Day. Television brought the Election Day celebrants inside, enticing them to stay in their living rooms with extensive analysis, computer graphics, and the delivery of ever-faster results. Living room celebrants received the same information as newspaper crowds and restaurant-goers, but without the disadvantages: cigar smoke, drunks in the street, braying winners, sullen losers, noisy, ill-mannered ruffians throughout, corn-pone humor, vulgar slogans and songs, and out-of-tune horns. It was no longer necessary to brave the indignities of the democratic, vulgar herd in order to discover the picture of the political nation. Television transformed the national ritual and civic ritual of Election Day into a series of moving pictures on a screen.

But was not only through its direct effects on the way that the Election Day celebration took place that television effected the meaning of Election Day in the late twentieth century. It also played an indirect role in understanding Election Day, as a metaphor for talking about the more general dissatisfaction that surrounded the day: and charges that it had become a shallow and dull event, and in the end perhaps a meaningless one.

### The change in Election Day space:

While the disappearance of the Election night celebration from the streets of the Center City is the most notable change in the post-War era of Philadelphia's Election Day, it would be wrong to so say that the celebration disappeared altogether. Philadelphians still did get a view of Election night festivities, only these were from a distance. Political parties and the campaign staffs of the candidates started opening the doors of their private celebrations, with fancy buffet trays, balloons, confetti, bands, shouting and cheers, to the general public via the television set.<sup>6</sup> Eager to fill up air time and to give their remote reports some color, local and national television newscasts often broadcast clips from these private parties, featuring campaign workers in the background—either ecstatic or depressed, as the case might be—and quotes from VIPs explaining how to interpret the response of the voters.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that the televised celebration of the election replaced the festivities in the streets, individualized Election night celebrations began to spring up. Or rather, a push was made to develop the idea. An article in the 1952 Election Day edition of the *Inquirer* provided recipes for an Election night party. The paper suggested decorating the house with red, white and blue ribbons. It explained how homemakers could make up a political centerpiece: a grapefruit or orange, covered with the names of various favorite candidates.<sup>8</sup> A few people must have taken the suggestions to heart, since newspaper columnists began writing about these parties in their Election Day stories.<sup>9</sup> These get-togethers came across in the pages of the

newspapers as genteel affairs, very different from the raucous crowds of an earlier age. Just how widespread they now are, or ever became, is not clear. Polls about Election Day behavior tend to focus on voting and related political behavior: stumping for a candidate, driving voters to polls, displaying a sign in the window. They do not ask about attending Election night parties. Certainly, the parties do not seem to figure greatly in the public discourse surrounding Election Day during this period, suggesting that they were, and are, a rather restricted phenomenon. The most plausible hypothesis is that if one was a certain kind of person—well-educated, wealthy, politically involved—one was more likely to attend such a party, from time to time, just as one was more likely to vote. Election night parties were performances of social status, put on for the benefit of a select group of friends and families.

The changing space in which these celebrations took place suggests one way in which television transformed the Election Day space. Distinctions between public and private space were more difficult to discern, now. Television replaced an actual, physical space—the center of the city, the local tavern or restaurant—with an electronic space in which viewers met without coming into actual bodily contact. The living room, long considered private space, had become the location for the celebration of the central political act of most viewers' lives. Private parties of the candidate and workers, heretofore private and kept out of public eye, were likewise brought into the public space. The ordinary citizen, outside of party politics, watched others celebrating the victory. Viewers did not participate in the celebration of Election night by marching in the streets or blowing on horns. They participated



through *watching others* cheer and dance in hotel rooms and restaurants. Although television precipitated this move, it was soon enough followed by newspapers, which began to center their day-after stories on the reactions of campaign workers and partisans at the candidates' parties rather than the reactions of people in the streets.<sup>10</sup>

In the Television Age, the private victory celebrations or the private losses of the candidate were no longer really private. They were, in a sense, public performances of the campaign and the party. In 1972, a man named Perry Abrams, who called himself the national mascot for the Republican party, dressed up in a Elephant suit for President Nixon's 1972 re-election party. Abrams and a young blonde woman wearing a President Nixon straw hat, along with about fifteen other people, congregated in front of the cameras, dancing and cheering as the favorable poll numbers came. The band playing the event complained because "no one but the elephant was dancing." The musicians misunderstood the rationale of the party. Abrams and other Republicans were not dancing for themselves; they were dancing for others, the folks at home, who might otherwise think that the GOP was a party of squares and gray suited businessmen.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of the public intrusion into the once-private world of the candidate celebration, the ordinary citizen could glimpse divisions and infighting that might have remained hidden in earlier times. In 1960, the Independent Committee for Kennedy celebrated apart from the Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup> This became standard practice on Philadelphia's Election night. These separate parties indicated wider cultural and ideological splits among traditional political allies. In 1964, the *Inquirer* ran several

stories highlighting the fact that both major parties were holding two different Center City parties on Election night. While the city's G.O.P party chairman was busy denying the existence of "Goldwaterites" at the Republican official Election night party on Fifteenth Street, a reporter noted that Goldwater volunteers had started up their own celebration at the Warwick Hotel, several blocks away, complete with their own catering, phone lines, and tote boards for tallying the returns.<sup>13</sup> The split between Democrats was based on the distinction between "vols" and "pols." Regular Democratic workers (the pols) met at the party headquarters in the Bellevue-Statford and crowed over the Democrats' overwhelming victory in the city. At the same time, the Volunteers for Johnson, a more reformist bunch, celebrated Johnson's victory and bitterly discussed Genevieve Blatter's Senate loss. The volunteers blamed the defeat in part on the city's decade-old Democratic machine, which had supported a different candidate in the primary. Amid accusations of sell-outs and ethnic prejudice (Blatter's Democratic primary opponent had been an Italian American), the two groups had little to say to one another on Election night, and little contact. Joe Clark, leader of the city's reform forces, made an appearance at the Volunteer celebration but not the regular party celebration.<sup>14</sup> The day after the 1972, Frank Rizzo, newly in control of the city machine, was pictured holding a dead chicken with a McGovern/Shriver button pinned to its chest. The mayor had supported President Nixon over the Democratic candidate, and was celebrating the Republican President's win over at the Democratic Party headquarters. Meanwhile, at the candidate's headquarters, McGovern's more radical supporters seethed.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, national campaigns for President developed their own, massive celebratory parties that the winning candidate could then use to define himself for the country, a sort of warm-up for the Inauguration Ball. In 1992, national viewers saw Bill Clinton and his wife step up to the balcony of the Arkansas Governor's mansion as the people of Little Rock cheered deliriously and Fleetwood Mac blared over the speakers. A new generation was taking control of the country, one that had come of age during the 1960s and the 1970s, its values—and its taste in music—more in tune with the nation.<sup>16</sup> On the 2000 Election night, Al Gore held a huge party in Nashville, TN, his home state. George Bush celebrated with a group of country and western acts outside the Governor's mansion in Austin.<sup>17</sup> As with the Clinton's bash, these parties probably had a symbolic purpose. Bush's identification with country music helped to cement his image as the champion of small town, rural, middle class white Americans, what would come to be known as "red America" following the Election night. Gore's party could be read as an attempt to reject the notion that Gore was a Washington insider and East Coast liberal, by playing up his Southern roots.

Two points ought to be made about this change in Election night space. The first relates to the richness of the experience. In one sense, television resulted in a diminution or a thinning out of the experience of Election night. However intriguing these parties might be, whatever glimpses they might provide the democratic viewer of the party lives of the powerful and politically famous, it is hard to believe that they could have meant for as vivid an experience as the older style of celebration. They engaged only two senses—sight and sound—and these only in a partial form. Earlier

celebrations had called on all senses—the bright flares of exploding crackers and bonfires in the night air, the sharp sounds of cannons booming, the huge roar of thousands of people cheering, the smell of gunpowder and beer and cigar smoke. The spectacle offered by the television was a poor substitute. Radio broadcasts had tried to simulate some of the excitement of the Election night celebration, with vaudeville and music interspersed between the returns. Television dispensed with entertainment, and played up its advantages, which were speed, a wealth of numbers, and the technical ability to perform intricate quantitative analyses of these numbers.<sup>18</sup>

The other important change resulting from the transformed Election night space relates to the question of segregation. The nineteenth-century Election night spectacle was a remarkably varied affair. Working class voters from Squire McMullen's Fourth Ward, middle class voters marching down from the suburbs, the rich and powerful, all came down to the same central point to see what was what. It was a more open, inclusive event than the vote itself, certainly, since several groups who were not allowed to vote—including Asian immigrants, women, children—eventually found themselves waiting outside the newspaper offices or party headquarters. Partisans of differing political persuasion, nativists and Irish workers, Catholics and Jews, losers and winners, were all part of the democratic mix of Election night. People that normally might not have much to do with one another were forced to abide their neighbors, at least for a few hours.

The televised spectacle was a calmer sort of event, because the citizen was not bothered by the presence of other social types. To the extent that the citizen did wish

to celebrate with others, it would be part of a private party, with people who generally agreed with one's own opinions, with one's own outlook, and therefore could be depended upon to react to the vote, either gleefully or woefully, in the same general manner, without too much offense given to one's political and moral sensibilities.

But the Election night broadcast also, paradoxically, probably increased the *ideological* diversity of the Election night experience for many Philadelphians at the same that it reduced what one might call its corporeal diversity. Although a celebration of the whole body politic, the street-level Election night festival presumed the individual would participate as a member of only a segment of that body. Mass media addressed him, by and large, as a partisan. Interpretations of the results, calls to arms, were made in a partisan fashion. As late as the 1940s, newspapers like the *Inquirer*, the *Evening Bulletin*, and the *Philadelphia Record* (the main Democratic organ) were relatively unproblematic partisan mouthpieces.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of television networks, where ideological choice was not available to viewers, strict on-air neutrality needed to be maintained. This dovetailed with changes to the ethos of American journalism that promoted a nonpartisan, "objective" interpretation of events, so that by the mid to late 60s even long-time partisan sheets like the *Inquirer* had, by and large, moved away from their overtly pro-Republican stance.<sup>20</sup> This led to two changes. For one thing, journalists now relied on others (campaign workers, party leaders, partisan intellectuals) to give a partisan twist to the interpretation. The second change is that networks and mass broadsheets—the latter obtaining, by the 1970s, much the same dominant market position as networks—

tended to call on interpretations from both Republican and Democratic positions, and occasionally from third-party groups as well.

As an example of this changed perspective, take the broadcast of PBS's *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour* for 1984's Election night. Much of the hour's newscast was taken up with Election Day events, and in particular with an interview between anchor Robin MacNeil and four different scholars and writers—Norman Podhoretz, John Kenneth Galbraith, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and John Ehrlichman.<sup>\*</sup> Because the Election result itself was not news—President Reagan's victory had been a foregone conclusion for some time—most of the broadcast was taken up with analysis of the “meaning” of the election.

Prior to MacNeil's interview, the newscast featured a brief segment with two grassroots party activists, Democrat Harald Jinks and Republican Mary Nell Reece. Jinks said Reagan's win was a triumph of style over substance, and argued that the public simply didn't understand tax policy well enough to realize how the President's proposals would damage the country. Reece responded that the rural voters among which she worked supported Reagan because he made them feel good. Although the economy had not picked up in rural areas, Reece told PBS correspondent Kwame Holman that farmers had learned the value of patience and new that Reagan's policies would benefit them eventually. (To a surprising degree, the further analysis by the

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<sup>\*</sup> Although none of the guests were formal members of either of the major candidates' campaigns, their political preferences were public knowledge—Ehrlichman and Podhoretz were Reagan supporters, Galbraith and Norton liberal Democrats—and we can assume that many, if not most, PBS viewers knew their biases.

network “big guns” ended up being simply a re-articulation and elaboration of Reece’s and Jinks’ arguments.)

MacNeil then began the roundtable discussion by asking Podhoretz whether Reagan’s landslide meant that a realignment in American politics had occurred. Podhoretz replied that main issue around which any possible realignment might take place was the resurgence of American power, and whether it ought to be further pursued, or abandoned. The interviewer then turned to Galbraith and asked a similar question. Galbraith responded that some realignment had occurred, the result of increased divisions among rich and poor in America and the loss of a middle-class consensus around certain basic social guarantees. Next up was Ehrlichman, who credited the Democratic woes with their failure to present new ideas and their unwillingness to recognize that their domestic agenda was too leftwing for the American public. Holmes Norton responded that the main problem for Mondale had been psychological, not political, since Americans agreed with him on the issues. The United States had gone through great changes in the past 20 years, and Americans wanted a leader like Reagan, who put them at ease and comforted them, Norton told MacNeil. Podhoretz responded to this claim by saying that Norton’s lack of respect for the intelligence of the American people was a good example of why Democrat’s were so weak politically, and the interview then carried on in this fashion, with a representative from one side given an opportunity to “spin” the results, MacNeil then giving one of the members of the other side a chance to respond, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

“Analysis” of the election result that aims at rationalizing defeat or victory with the interests of party in mind was certainly not new. What is important here, what is new, is the structure of the interview, the alternation between the two different viewpoints. A Philadelphia Republican in the 1920s would have turned to the pages of the *Evening Bulletin* or the *Inquirer* the day after an election to get a Republican understanding of the result’s “meaning.” A Democrat would have gone to the *Record* for a similar reason. But it would be virtually impossible for a partisan viewer to watch the *MacNeil/Lehrer* analysis without being forced to listen to the opposing side voice their opinions about why the election had turned out the way it had. The fact that partisans might simply discount the opposing sides’ interpretation—as typical Republican stupidity, or typical Democratic arrogance—is not as important as the fact that they are forced to listen to it. The message of the broadcast structure, rather than its content—the meta-message of the broadcast—is that the other side’s opinion is a necessary and legitimate element of the polity that is being celebrated. In this sense, the Election night broadcast is similar to Dayan and Katz’s media events category of *contests*. What is celebrated in the *contest*—the Olympic Games, the Presidential debate, or in this case the democratic vote—is not only, or even primarily, the victory, but the fact of contest itself, of a pluralistic view of the human world.<sup>22</sup>

The changing space of the Election night celebration, then, provided at least three important messages for Philadelphians of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, the segmentation of space allowed for, and in some sense encouraged, a kind of hierarchy of the citizenry and its duties. Certain people—campaign workers and insiders, and the



candidates themselves—continued to celebrate the election bodily, just as they continued to be responsible for much of the rest of the political world. Certain others—those particularly interested in political issues—might get together for an election night celebration with other, like-minded friends. The rest of the city—probably most of it—which might not have an interest in political issues per se, was allowed to ignore the celebration if it wished, or to pay only sporadic attention. The other forms of entertainment or spectacle that might have brought this last group out to a nineteenth century Election night festival—the lights, the technological wonders, the music and fireworks—was eliminated by the celebration’s movement onto television, a medium that by and large did not do a very good job at transmitting this sort of richly textured, multi-sensory experience. Like much of the rest of the culture, it declared such things unnecessary to Election night, disposable. To the extent that this population experienced an Election night celebration, it was vicariously, by watching others cheer and celebrate on television. The changed celebration suggests Lazarsfeld and Merton’s famous “narcotizing dysfunction,” in which mass media replace *acting* with *watching others act*.<sup>23</sup>

Although the televised spectacle did not do a very good job of forcing Philadelphians into contact with each other, it did a much better job of celebrating the notion of ideological diversity than it had in the past, by making the broadcast a forum for multiple points of view. Not all points of view, certainly: Gus Hall and George Lincoln Rockwell did not appear on the networks’ Election night broadcasts to give their views on the result. Nonetheless, thanks to changes in social attitudes arising

from the Civil Rights movement and related events, the interpretations of a wider spectrum of Americans was being presented on Election night broadcasts. The simple presence of Podhoretz and Holmes Norton sent a message: that the responsibility of interpreting the nation's political identity was no longer the purview only of White, Anglo-Saxon males. A different image of what America was—of who America was—came into view. Principles of dialogue, of rational exchange, of universality, were more explicitly realized at this point than it had been at perhaps any other time in Election Day's history.

Significantly, however, this message of political tolerance was not a message for all. The televised celebration, like the act of voting itself, was an activity in which only a certain segment of the American population took part. Estimates for the dramatic 2000 Election night were in the neighborhood of 61.6 million viewers.<sup>24</sup> Although this was the largest ever televised audience for an Election night return—and 70 per cent larger than the audience had been four years earlier—it was nowhere near the audience levels for major American televised events, like Super Bowls or the Academy awards.<sup>25</sup> The televised event was a celebration of politics put on for the benefit of a certain segment of the population. It did not have the populist feel of a late-twentieth century sporting or entertainment event.

#### TV's portrait of the nation:

In terms of giving an up-to-date account of the results of the Election Day contest, television's Election night broadcasts seemed to do everything better than

their forebears. They brought the results faster, they were generally more accurate, and as a rule more complete, all thanks to the intersection between television and several other, newer, technologies—the computer, and the modern science of public opinion polling. The televised Election night's superiority on this score not immediately obvious, although it might seem so now. In 1948, thanks to the closeness of the race, the CBS broadcast with Edward Murrow and the network's other correspondents had to sign off with the race still in doubt. Dewey did not read his concession speech until 11 o'clock the next morning.<sup>26</sup> Given that newspaper crowds in Philadelphia during the 1920s and 1930s had grown used to knowing by 10 PM on Election night who their next President would be, the quickness of the returns was somewhat less than underwhelming. But in the event of a more lopsided race, the effects of the new technology became readily apparent. In 1952, UNIVAC, which CBS was using to calculate the returns, predicted an Eisenhower landslide by 8:30 the night of the election. The result was unexpected, since campaign polls had made the vote much closer, and CBS and Murrow sat on the information for 2 and a half hours (CBS radio, using the older form of forecasting based on key precincts, told listeners shortly after 8 that Eisenhower had cracked the solid south and seemed to be on his way to victory).<sup>27</sup> By the second Eisenhower-Stevenson Election night, the networks were more comfortable with computers, and all three major networks had predicted an Eisenhower victory by 8 o'clock.<sup>28</sup>

We will address the problem that early projections presented to the electorate presently. For the moment, it is worth noting that the most immediate crisis they

provoked was with the networks themselves. The situation is this. If one wishes to provide a night's worth of news coverage to the audience, and the race of most significance to the viewing public is, for all intents and purposes, over by the beginning of the evening, then how does the network keep the viewers interested in the program? The possibility of entertaining them, or dazzling them then with spectacle, is not realistic. In an age when most of the television sets were of poor sound quality, and all of them were in black and white, it was not likely that the networks could keep Election night crowds to the living room sets through attempting to duplicate the older Election night attractions. Television simply could not compete with the downtown scene on that score. And it probably didn't even want to try. Older forms of journalism, both print and radio, were already publicly contemptuous of television's upstart status. As in every battle of news media forms since at least the introduction of the penny press, print and radio's defenders characterized television news as sloppy, as banal and shallow, as second-rate. In an age when the informed voter was the accepted normative model of what a citizen should be on Election night, any attempt to confuse the issue by mixing in entertainment with the news would have simply added fodder for the critics.<sup>29</sup>

But information, or more precisely the ability to provide a great deal of information in a very short space of time, and an ability to deliver information in several modes, was exactly where television was superior to either print or the radio. Naturally enough, the networks played to this advantage. They brought in political insiders and crack reporters to comment on what the victories and losses meant.<sup>30</sup>

They trumpeted their new computer technology.<sup>31</sup> They developed sophisticated presentations of the massive amount of data they gathered through exit polls and official returns.<sup>32</sup> In 1972, the three networks spent only a third of their time reporting returns. The rest of the broadcasts were spent on interviews, candidate speeches, and reports from campaign headquarters.<sup>33</sup>

These broadcasts were also more explicitly national in scope. Earlier mass media had been centered in the city of Philadelphia. The picture the audience got of the nation was as viewed from the banks of the Schulykill. In the age of the network television broadcast, on the other hand, the viewer got almost as much information and interpretation about nationally important Senate races in North Carolina and Wisconsin as on the results from Pennsylvania's first Congressional district. Political experts spun the results into a kind of vision of the national political culture, taken as a seamless whole: the President's short coat-tails suggested the death of traditional party loyalties, the swing to the Republicans of the solid south was evidence of a sea change in the nation's political divisions, and so forth.<sup>34</sup>

An interpretative, analytical picture of the nation is necessarily an incomplete picture of the political nation. The interpretative broadcast required something else to make the nation vivid to viewers and readers. Hence, post-Election commentary was also filled with visual images of democratic bodies, of candidates and voters, and often candidates *as* voters. Taking a cue from earlier media forms, especially the print coverage of the candidates voting, networks often placed images of the Presidential candidates going to the polls at the head of their broadcasts. Television cameras would

follow the candidate to the voting booth, after which he would be expected to give a quick comment to the press, assuring his reporters of victory (even in those occasions when such assurances were manifestly unreasonable) or, if leading by enough in the polls, perhaps make a joke: “well, that’s one vote I got, anyway.”<sup>35</sup> Besides identifying the candidate with Everyman—Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale had to vote in the same, drab, high school gyms and post offices as everyone else—the trip to the polls provided the national broadcast with a kind of a beginning to its narrative that it would then follow the rest of the night. The story began at the polls, then passed through a period of uncertainty, as journalists sifted through the various returns and divined its meaning. The ending came with the candidates’ final speeches of victory and concession.

These speeches were already a tradition by the time that television came onto the scene, but like the trip to the polls, television was able to elaborate upon and refine them.<sup>36</sup> The speeches are a key moment in the modern Election night television broadcast, because they signal the official end to the election. Most relevantly, they signal an end to division and a reintegration into a wider political whole, the moment when *Republicans* and *Democrats* begin a metamorphosis back into *Americans*. At one point journalistic institutions lead the charge on this score. Anti-Roosevelt newspapers in 1936, for example, featured editorials the day after the election calling for support of the President, and an acceptance of the result. Roosevelt was the leader of all Americans; the nation’s ability to accept the result is what made it different from Fascist and Communist dictatorships.<sup>37</sup> In the post-war era, candidates, not the

objective and non-partisan media outlets, become the primary spokesmen for their various factions at the moment of reintegration. Their duties were clear. The victor needed to avoid gloating, needed to give on the appearance of humbleness. Often, it was a good idea to call on God for strength in the immense trials ahead.<sup>38</sup> This softening of the victory celebration was important not only to assuage the hurt feelings of the opposition. As the candidate became the symbolic bodily presence of all Americans, it was important for the nation to see its most favored qualities in him: quiet strength, dignity, and the wisdom of the good sport. Street urchins in the 1860s, mocking the losers the day after the vote, were allowed to be malicious: they were of no account anyhow, mere partisan whelps. But the successful Presidential candidate represented the viewer, and his actions and behavior were thus a vision of the viewer's own.

Perhaps more important than the behavior of the winner was the image of the loser, who was required to accept his failure with grace and dignity, to play the part of the wounded warrior. When he failed to do this—for example, when Al Gore refused to concede the race to George Bush—even his own partisans became somewhat uneasy. Gore's actual concession speech, coming the day after the Supreme Court decision, brought nearly unanimous praise from media commentators. MSNBC's Chris Matthews, a frequent critic of the Vice President during the Florida recount struggle, was perhaps most effusive, calling the concession "majestic," "almost sacramental." "[W]hoever wrote that speech... understands not just the law of America but the myth of America," Matthews told his viewing audience. By refusing to

continue with his challenge any longer, Gore had allowed to nation to begin the necessary role of coming back together. Combining the grace of the winner with the dignity of the loser, the election night broadcast gave Americans a portrait of their country, the pluralistic vision at the heart of American Election Day, if not of American democracy.<sup>39</sup>

The other democratic body of Election Day is the voter him or herself. Election night broadcasts and day after reports of the vote thus often carried photos or clips of average voters going to the polls, illustrating some feature or another of the American Democratic process, a comforting image, showing the gears of democracy meshing, more or less well. In 1940, the *Evening Bulletin* ran a photo of two poll workers jokingly pulling a third man, the voter, from either side. All three men had smiles on their faces, the photo obviously an orchestration. By making the subject of party competition humorous, a game, the photo more or less defused it. Party battles were not serious; they did not really divide us. They were merely something that we put on for a short time and would easily dispose of once the election was over.<sup>40</sup> Other photos showed voters waiting patiently at the polls, or walking out of the polling booth with smiles on their faces: good citizens all, just doing their democratic duty in a humble, sensible spirit.<sup>41</sup>

Post-election stories rarely held news any longer of voter bribery or violence. Instead, they often tended to portray the polling booth as a peaceful, almost quaint space, from another time or place. One story in the 1980s from the *Inquirer's* pages described a polling station located in a neighborhood salon as a scene "out of small



town America.” Indeed, the polling station of *Inquirer* columnist John C. Cummings, located in a fire station, seemed like Mayberry R.F.D. Cummings went to the polls in the morning with his wife and dog. Once he got to the polls, there were cakes, pies, cookies, baked by the women of the ladies auxiliary. After he finished voting, he passed the time with the town police chief, Chief Rossiter (who was there in a unofficial capacity, there being “no need for police protection at a Center Square election”), and a spunky young Democratic poll worker who was not having much success. Cummings took his leave of the scene “on a note of Democratic optimism.”<sup>42</sup>

What picture of the national public did the Election night broadcast present to the public of Philadelphia during the Age of television? A public first of all that could be analyzed and interpreted through the use of statistics and computers: a set of numbers.<sup>43</sup> A public, second, in which many of the most important responsibilities of Election Day, like the celebration of the vote itself, or the moment of reconciliation, were performed by the candidates, for the rest of the public to see. In contrast, the citizen’s duty on the day was restricted, more and more, to a single space, the voting booth, and to a single act. For the ordinary citizen, this short period at the polls was all that marked Election Day off from any other day in the year.

#### The problematic performance: technology, and early returns

Television is very nearly the universal symbol of late or post-modernity. As such, it is often forced to carry a great deal of responsibility for the fault lines in modern society. Such was the case with Election Day. If Americans found fault with

the way that the celebrated democracy on Election Day, then one of the main culprits was the modern media, and particularly that most ubiquitous example of the media, the television set.

A clear instance of television's controversial effects was the practice of "predicting," or "projecting," the winner of the Presidential election while many polls were still open. The issue first came to prominence with the 1964, and Johnson's easy win over Goldwater. The extent of Johnson's victory was so great that NBC actually projected a victory at 6:48 Eastern time, long before polls had closed anywhere in American except, perhaps, Dixville Notch, NH. All three networks made a more definitive call for Johnson around 9 o'clock, after the polls had closed on the East Coast but still long before the closing of the polls in California, Oregon, and Washington.<sup>44</sup>

The ability to deliver returns to the population ever more quickly was not the result of television but of a technological system of which electronic communication was one part. In order to provide early returns, television networks also drew upon modern polling techniques, increasingly sophisticated methods of statistical analysis, and of course the computer. Particularly in the 1950s, when the technology was brand-new, computers figured prominently in the networks' advertising campaigns and promotional efforts. NBC and CBS trumpeted their computers' ability to analyze the data as soon as possible and to spit out the results to a hungry, waiting nation.<sup>45</sup> As the technology became more familiar its use as promotional material was negated. Networks turned to the computer instead to provide ever more sophisticated graphic

presentations, and to provide it with more data for analysis. In the 1990s, viewers could see not just how the country as whole, or various states and regions, had voted, but how African Americans had voted, how members of upper income households had tended, how suburban mothers had voted.<sup>46</sup>

The advantage of the new forecasting technology was that it was unbiased, unlike earlier forecasting technologies like readers' predictions, straw polls, or prognostications from interested party leaders. The poll and the computer could be depended to tell the truth: they were not political tools, but scientific ones. Although Election night anchors might anthropomorphize the computer for the sake of humor, in fact it was understood that the computer and the scientific poll were far more trustworthy than a person. "[I]f we say that someone's carried a state, you can pretty much take it to the bank," CBS anchor Dan Rather famously declared on Election night 2000.<sup>47</sup> What this technological belief forgot was that humans were involved with the technology, and therefore mistakes were not simply possible but in the long run inevitable and that their analysis could be used in partisan ways. Famously, polls failed to pick up on President Truman's late surge in 1948, and mistakenly predicted a Presidential win for Dewey.<sup>48</sup> In 1968, the nation news media's entire vote-gathering effort was forced to shut down in the midst of Election night, when the main computer at the News Election Service—then the centralized data-gathering point for all major news services—began to spew out nonsensical data. The problem was eventually traced to a programming error, which led a NES official to remark that, "[t]here was

no machine failure. It was that simple little problem with the programmer. It was a human failure.”<sup>49</sup>

The nature of the modern election-gathering system often exaggerated mistakes, thanks its centralized source point. The NES had been created in 1964, when, faced with rising Election night costs, networks quickly joined with wire services and several major national newspapers to create a single office responsible for gathering returns.<sup>50</sup> But the pressure to get the news of the contest out ever more quickly forced the networks to search for ways to anticipate the vote count through other means. This in turn led to the practice of exit polls, getting information from voters directly as they left the polling place. Exit polling gave the networks a quicker method of predicting the race, and also provided it with more data for the Election night analysis, but it was expensive. In 1993, another consortium—the Voter News Service, or VNS—sprang up. The VNS was a single group, financed by money from the major news services, which was responsible both for returns and for conducting exit polling throughout the country.<sup>51</sup> It saved the networks money, but it also meant that, as in 1968, any mistake would be duplicated throughout the nation’s new-gathering system. Since all news outlets were using same news source, they could not be relied upon to correct the mistakes of competitors.<sup>52</sup>

For most of the period in question, however, the real problem with the televised returns was not that they were occasionally wrong—this happened relatively rarely—but that they were generally so accurate that they threatened to make voting nonsensical. Early returns—that is, projections of winners announced on-air before the

closing of polls in some or all voting districts—garnered a great deal of commentary, both by scholarly analysts and within the television community itself. The early return dramatically reduced the incentive to vote: of one's choice had already lost, or won, what was the point? Critics of the practice quoted studies about the effects of television returns on voter turnout.<sup>53</sup> Networks tried to deflect criticism by presenting an image of responsibility. In 1964, Walter Cronkite told CBS viewers around 7 PM that while the network could project Mr. Johnson the winner, “that isn't the way the game is played here.” At NBC, anchor David Brinkley was telling viewers who hadn't gone to the polls yet to stop watching TV and “get out and vote.” Criticized by George McGovern's campaign manager for projecting Nixon a winner by 7 PM, NBC's John Chancellor announcer defended the network's projections as generally pretty accurate.<sup>54</sup>

Chancellor's claim is beside the point; accuracy was not the problem here. What the McGovern campaign was complaining about was that the reporting of the vote was interfering with the act of voting itself. The charge would increasingly become a dominant theme of the televised election night. Democrats on the West Coast of the country charged that the early prediction of Ronald Reagan's Presidential victory, and Jimmy Carter's subsequent concession speech, both of which aired nationally before polls closed in California and other far western states. The early concession led many Democratic voters in those states to conclude that going to the polls would not be worth their time. Because of the decision of Democrats to stay at

home, Democrats charged, they lost several important Congressional, senate, and state and local races.<sup>55</sup>

In order to work as an instrument of communal choice, Election Day requires two separate events. First, the electorate must transmit a series of messages to the state electoral administration. Second, various social institutions—both private and public—must accumulate these messages and return them to the electorate, to tell the public what it has decided. The central “scandal” in this case was that by broadcasting the contest’s result before it had ended television threatened to confound the logic of Election Day, and in so doing made it internally incoherent. The declaration of a decision before the decision in fact took place renders the vote irrelevant, almost irrational.

For the voters of Philadelphia, the early returns were only a theoretical problem. As East Coast residents, it was unlikely that they would hear about the result before voting. But they were faced with a similar problem in the case of the campaign poll. Because of the accuracy of polling, the result of a campaign in many instances could be known before the vote was taken, which seemed to make Election Day redundant. For this reason, polls, like early broadcast returns, were also attacked as destructive instruments. Journalists and politicians—especially those running behind in the polls—called on citizens to prove the pollsters wrong, as though George Gallup were about to steal democracy away from Americans.<sup>56</sup>

The effects of Election night broadcasts and campaign polling played into common fears about mass media’s seemingly Godlike ability to create its own reality.

Unrepresentative institutions and non-elected officials—networks, news anchors—seemed to be arrogating for themselves a decision that only the people had a right to make. Debate over returns seemed to prove exactly what critics of the television culture had long argued: that the networks were destructive of public culture, that they cared for little beyond their profits and their ratings. The culture of journalism also came under attack. The desire to be first with the scoop triumphed over responsibility to the body politic.<sup>57</sup>

With the election of 2000, a new communication technology came to the fore, one that threatened to replace television as the dominant mass medium for the nation. Pro-technology journalists and intellectuals lauded the Internet's potential for advancing the cause of democracy. It gave citizens the opportunity to choose their own media menu, rather than having it foisted upon them by the corporate America. It dramatically expanded the opportunities for gathering information about policy issues. It allowed for interactive media use. At least in theory, voters could ask candidates questions directly, rather than relying on journalists to do the job.<sup>58</sup> From the viewpoint of Election Day, however, and in particular as regarded the question of early projections, the Internet did not solve but rather threatened to exacerbate the problem. Because of their monopoly over exit polling results through the VNS, and in response to public criticism, the major news media could, and did, agree to wait on projecting winners from any state until that state's poll had closed. This agreement required the consent of only relatively few groups: the major networks, CNN, a few others. The advent of the Internet had meant that returns might now be available to a

huge number of news outlets, many of whom did not feel obligated to abide by the agreement. After threats of legal action, however, these smaller outlets, which include the on-line version of the *National Review* and *Slate* magazine, agreed (grudgingly) not to air the early returns.<sup>59</sup> This did not solve the theoretical problem that the Internet presented, however, to the rationale of voting at all.

The problem presented by the early return can be taken as part of a much larger issue, whether is the end Election Day actually meant something, or was simply some empty gesture. If a single vote did not make any realistic difference to the outcome of a race, then why go to the polls? If the two candidates were pretty much the same in the end, then why care who won? If polls already gave the public a pretty accurate notion about who was to win before the voting booths ever opened, then what was the point of having an Election Day at all? Philadelphians had always harbored doubts about the way that they performed Election Day, but this new worry was somewhat different. It seemed to raise doubts about Election Day as such. Had the day become, simply, a *meaningless* ritual?

#### Problematic performers (part I): the media candidate

Much of the debate over television's baleful influence revolved around a distrust of political spectacle, of style and of performance, and in particular centered on the image of the media candidate. Suspicion of politics in the television era was of a piece with American's suspicion of the medium itself. Television emphasized the fluff, the surface, at the expense of the issues. Even when politicians tried to discuss



substantial things, real things of real interest to real Americans, television worked against them. As an Election Day editorial in 1976 declared, “the medium sometimes droned out the message the candidates were trying to spread.”<sup>60</sup> The allusion to McLuhan is no accident. Given that the worries about television and the worries about the triumph of style over substance, of personality over issue, had arisen at roughly the same time as television itself, it was natural for American journalism to presume that they were somehow related. McLuhan’s theory gave journalists a ready-made explanation for the baleful influence of television on the body politic.<sup>61</sup>

Television’s intimate connection to modern American capitalism only increased suspicions. Television was not only shallow, it was corporate, an oligarchic system that imposed a hegemonic view of the world, one entirely appropriate to the agenda of economic and social power.<sup>62</sup> Thus it was entirely fitting that it was the medium through which the populace experienced the modern election, an empty event that provided the illusion of choice covering the reality of a single-party system, designed to foster the interests of the wealthy and powerful. Given that access to corporate media required money and social prestige, only candidates willing to capitulate to the corporate agenda were able to get the airtime necessary to present their views. Those men or women too threatening to corporate capitalism, like Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Ralph Nader, were marginalized either through journalistic rhetoric, or through institutional safeguards (as when the Election Commission kept Nader off of the nationally televised Presidential debates in 2000).<sup>63</sup>

Fears of the banality of television culture and the control of capitalist hegemony coalesced in the figure of the media candidate. Theorists of the new media forms suggested that the power of the electronic medium stressed the irrational over the rational, hence personality over issues, hence candidate over party. As electoral politics came to revolve more and more around the ability to get airtime, either by being photogenic or television friendly—a la John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, or John McCain—or by building a huge campaign war chest, in order to bombard voters with commercials, it was the candidate (and his shadowy “spin-doctor”) rather than the party, that became a problematic figure. The shallow candidate of the television age—full of honeyed words but empty of substance, like FDR in the pages of the *Inquirer* several decades earlier—became an increasingly important part of Election Day rhetoric in the twentieth century. Politicians who were skilful orators, who projected a charming personality, were to be mistrusted. John Cummings judged the eloquent Adlai Stevenson to be a clever speaker—“we enjoyed Mr. Stevenson, his quips and his mannerisms.” Nonetheless, while “our funnybone tells us to vote for Adlai,” common sense, fortified by a desire to clean up Washington, “dictates a vote for Eisenhower.”<sup>64</sup> Similar attacks dogged the successful candidacy of Bill Clinton, who became “slick Willie,” a smooth-talking, corrupt pol in the old style southern tradition. In 1996, long time network newscaster David Brinkley attacked Clinton on Election night as a bore and a spineless vote grubber.<sup>65</sup> George Bush, Jr., on the other hand, was portrayed as an idiotic mannequin, an image without intelligence or reason, propped up by money and campaign spin.<sup>66</sup> As with the more general notion of the televised political

spectacle, the concept of the media candidate often brought allusions to the central historical event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the ability of fascist leaders to use mass media to promote personality and irrationality over reason and policy.<sup>67</sup>

Although a general trend, the video candidate was probably most closely associated in the modern media discourse with the figure of Ronald Reagan. For his critics, Reagan seemed the apotheosis of modern democracy: a simple-minded, docile tool of corporate America and social conservatives, a surface of genial amiability covering a dangerous and mean-spirited policy agenda, and wholly the creature of the television age. What Reagan did better than all other politicians, so this theory went, was sell himself. His former occupation as actor fit perfectly into the reading. Reagan was not a *real* politician; he just played one on TV.<sup>68</sup>

On the Election Days of Reagan's two presidential victories, one debate that surface in both print and television was revolved around the question of surface versus substance. For Reagan's opponents, the image of the shallow video candidate was the appropriate one. "The Reagan campaign has been a distinguished example of slickness and cosmetic moderating of positions" wrote the *Inquirer*, in endorsing President Carter on Election Day, 1980:

Mr. Reagan has charm and a soothing, comforting manner. In an age of technically supersophisticated campaign management, with principal emphasis on television-projected imagery, he has emerged as a reasoning, positive, sensitive, and hope-filled man.

Beneath that surface there is the substance which would constitute the character of leadership and decision-making which Mr. Reagan would bring, if elected, to the White House, the nation, and the world.

**That substance promises danger. For it holds a deep threat of both irresponsibility and superficiality, in vision, intent, and commitment.<sup>69</sup>**

**In interpreting the results for the viewers of PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* in 1984, Eleanor Holmes Norton drew on pop psychology to explain Reagan's re-election. Americans were comfortable economically, and simply didn't want to be bothered with thinking about the issues, Holmes Norton explained to viewers. They had undergone great psychological stress in the preceding decades, and now wanted a grandfatherly figure like Reagan to reassure them.<sup>70</sup>**

**If the body politic is to reconstitute itself after the divisions instituted by the campaign, then the losers need to be reconciled to the result of the Election Day vote. Since the dawn of the American public, electoral losers have soothed their pride with assurances to each other that the cause was lost not through the public's disagreement with principles or men but through the illegitimate machinations of the opposition. Just as federalists told stories about ballot tubs with false bottoms and Jeffersonian Jacobins plying the democratic hordes with beer and rum, just as Whigs and Democrats traded accusations of wholesale personation and colonization of voters, just as Progressive reformers railed at the corrupt strong-arm tactics of the rings and bosses at the polls, so Election night commentators in the mass media age comforted themselves, and their fellow partisans, with jibes against the media itself, and nefarious PR men and masters of the political spin. In the event of a Democratic victory, conservative commentators could appease the wounds of Republicans with jeremiads against the liberal media's fawning over Bill Clinton or Jimmy Carter. In**

the case of the Republican victory, Democrats could cite the infantile nature of mass media coverage that resulted in yet another triumph for conservative dolts from Reagan to George Bush the younger.

But the debate over the video candidate involved a more substantial reflection on the Election Day celebration. In a modern democracy at least, the celebration of Election Day is always, in part, a celebration of equality. The power of the mass media, and of the mass media's controllers, threatened to turn Election Day into simply another demonstration of social power. Given the limited access to a scarce resource, television air time, which apparently necessary to the ascension of political power, how was Election Day to be understood as a democratic event? It was either the victory, repeated at four-year intervals, of the cultural elite (in the case of complaints about the liberal media) or the economic elite (in accusations of corporate sell-outs). In either case, the ordinary citizen could no longer take pride in his status as free citizen at the polling booth. He was merely a puppet for various groups to manipulate.

As a metaphor for the evident systematic social inequalities of the political system celebrated by Election Day, and as a balm for the wounded pride of the losing side, the media candidate undoubtedly served an important symbolic purpose. But this came at a price. The argument, in order to be plausible, required a radical rethinking of the voter him or herself. If it was this easy to fool the electorate, that is, the people, then how reliable was Election Day itself as a ritual for legitimating power?

### Problematic performers (part II): the voters

“In this division we have a number of people who look as if they could stand a drink,” Democratic watcher Joseph Dillon told an Election Day court in 1960, defending his practice of handing out dollar bills to voters after they exited the polls. “I don’t know how they vote—it isn’t for any vote.” The judge disagreed, calling the practice “disgraceful and irregular.”<sup>71</sup> In an earlier age, Republicans might have trumpeted a man like Dillon as evidence of Democratic perfidy; reformers could have pointed to him as an example of the evils of big city machine politics, but by the end of the century, his ilk were becoming, increasingly, an anachronism. Television stations might run Election night stories about fraud at the polls,<sup>72</sup> but the problem of voter fraud no longer occupied a prominent space in the discourse surrounding Election Day. “Street money” was explained away as payment for Election Day workers who took the day off to man the polls. The fact that such money might serve as bribes for voters was never explicitly stated. (When political operatives did make the point explicit, they were publicly chastised.)<sup>73</sup>

In the discourse of the times, stories of the Ward captain and the party worker took on an almost nostalgic tone. Election Day editions often featured sympathetic interviews with or profiles of machine workers—ward leaders, committee members—and their struggles to persuade an increasingly disenchanted public to get and vote. A reporter trailed Ella Dunn, Democratic leader of the city’s largely African American 44<sup>th</sup> ward, over the course of the day as she spoke to voters through mail slots, struggled with the measly street funds handed out by the city’s Democratic machine,

worried over a low voter turnout, and increasingly desperate, enlisted her son as a door-to-door canvasser late in the day. So the well-trained, militant “committees of surveillance” had devolved to this: a bored teenager running errands for his mother. In an era when fewer and fewer people were politically involved, the ward boss or precinct captain felt like a throwback to earlier, more politically innocent time. Ella Dunn at least took Election Day seriously.<sup>74</sup>

She was one of the few who, it seemed, any longer did so. Explanations for voter decline became a small industry in the social sciences.<sup>75</sup> It also became a central theme to much of the Election Day coverage. How would voter’s respond to the candidates? Would they reverse the general trend of downward turnout?<sup>76</sup> Although papers like the *Inquirer* continued to endorse candidates on Election Day many of its Election Day editorials and op-ed pieces were directed to simply encouraging voters to go the polls. “The polling place in a free election is the great equalizer,” the *Inquirer* wrote in 1952.<sup>77</sup> By 1964, the paper had become more severe and lecturing. Much was written about the vote as a cherished right and privilege, the editorial read. “Perhaps there should be greater emphasis on voting as a solemn duty and responsibility.”<sup>78</sup> In 1976, sociologist Andrew Greeley still was willing to write an lukewarm op-ed piece in support of the vote, comparing the choice Americans were offered to the non-choice of countries like Russia, China, and Cuba. “We know that even when the it works badly—and the choice offered us this year is an example of it going badly—the American system still gives you a chance to throw the rascals out.”<sup>79</sup>

Worries over voter competence, like the turnout problem, one that had started in the early twentieth century, were also a constant story. As with turnout, it was an issue that concerned both social scientists, and the public discourse of Election Day. Studies found that citizens lacked basic knowledge about fundamental political institutions and concepts, about the words of the United States constitution and the Declaration of Independence.<sup>80</sup> Such worries about political knowledge sometimes found their way into Election Day copy of Philadelphia's newspapers, just as the worries over turnout had.<sup>81</sup> Reformers had fought for the secret ballot and the voting machine in order to free the voter from the clutches of the boss; now they found that this meant she was also free from *their own* influence, failing to take account of the large body of knowledge and facts produced for her benefit, to guide her choice. Who knew what the hell she was doing once she got in that booth and pulled the lever? Maybe it was nothing more than a stab in the dark, a wild gamble based on little more than a hunch, or the cut of the candidate's suit, or a video on his hometown. Perhaps there were some people who just shouldn't be voting. Perhaps if you were too stupid to appreciate the value of the vote, then you were too stupid to be trusted with it.<sup>82</sup>

Like the arguments surrounding the media candidate, arguments about the incompetent electorate struck at the heart of the Election Day ritual, raising a fundamental question about whether it was doing what it was supposed to be doing. If many voters no longer even bothered to vote, and if many of those who did were not acting in a reflective and considered manner, how could its role as a representation of the democratic body be considered valid? As a moment when the roles of democratic



representatives and democratic electors were brought out into stark relief and inevitably found wanting, Election Day became a day for ruminating on the failures of modern democracy.<sup>83</sup>

Conclusion:

By the end of the twentieth century, Election Day was the occasion for a national grump on the state of politics, a crabbed, shrunken event that had little if any resemblance to the raucous celebrations of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Amidst an electorate that was growing increasingly cynical about the political regime under which Americans lived, Election Day's problematic character only seemed to reaffirm the doubts and distrust. It could be taken as simply one example, a symptom, of a larger disenchantment with the body politic. Like much of modern life that dissatisfied Americans in the latter half of the twentieth century, television was blamed for the woeful state of electoral politics. Television was a banal, shallow medium for a supposedly banal, shallow political culture. The distrust of the voter at the poll was in part due to the suspicion that Americans had decided to trade their democratic rights and responsibilities for the right to indulge in hedonistic, mindless and materialistic pursuits and comforting entertainment. The modernized Election Day, dominated by and in a sense performed for television, was perhaps simply another instance of this larger change in American life.

But the very ubiquity of television's role as social villain in modern discourse ought to make us suspicious. Television has been credited and blamed for so much in

modern life. Its main role in modern communication may not be so much as a method of transmitting information, but as a metaphor for discussing other divisions: the division between white and black, rich and poor, powerful and weak, image and reality, empire and colony. In the case of Election Day, television became a way to talk about the central problems raised by a vote within a large democratic society. Instead of referring to social inequality directly, Americans worried about the way that wealth could buy access to government offices through media campaigns. Wealth created the media candidate as its own puppet, and thereby made a mockery of Election Day's claim to celebrate the equality of citizens. In terms of the tension between pluralism and unity, television ushered in an age that was diametrically opposed in some sense to the partisan Election Days of the nineteenth centuries. On the former occasions, the danger was that parties, goaded by their champions in the press, would prove too divisive. In the twentieth century, the exact opposite problem arose. As a national, nonpartisan institution, the national television network was in danger of creating a consensual electoral political universe in which real differences between parties were either ignored or even considered illegitimate.

The uniqueness of the modern Election Day message lay not in what television delivers or does not deliver in terms of reliable information. To the extent that the televised campaign was simplistic and shallow, this does not make it all that much different from the campaign of 1840, or those of the late nineteenth century. What made Election Day different for Philadelphians during this period were the messages it did *not* send. First, there was relatively little discussion about the problems that had so

plagued earlier Election Days: worries about illegal voting, and physical clashes at the polls, these were almost totally absent from the Election Day discourse and the performance of the vote itself. Second, there were rarely attacks on any specific group that a journalist or politician might accuse of being especially responsible for corruption at the polls. The changing political universe of the times did not allow for explicit attacks on racial, ethnic, or religious groups. The worries about the voting electorate were now couched in more general terms, about whether the population was too disillusioned, or too ignorant about policy matters, or too apathetic to do the job required of it. Rarely mentioned was that the specific people discussing these problems did not, generally, think of themselves as dealing with these issues, but some other, ill-defined group of citizens. The problem of Election Day, in other words, lay—as it always had—not with *us*, but with *them*.

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<sup>1</sup> For reports of Election night in both Philadelphia and New York, see *Bulletin*, Nov. 8, 1944, p. 15. Another story on the same page quotes representatives of Center City nightclubs to the effect that Election night is one of the biggest nights of the year, and their disappointments of the crowds that year.

<sup>2</sup> For the 1948 Election night, *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1948, p. 7, mentions the scanty, somber crowd and quotes a street hawker of balloons and the owners of several taprooms complaining about business.

<sup>3</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1948, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Histories of the evolution of early national television broadcasts can be found in Thomas W. Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1916-1948," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 12.3 (1968); and Thomas A. Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1952-1976," *Journal of Communication*, 30.4 (1980). See also Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 131-139.

<sup>5</sup> Bohn, "Broadcasting National Election Returns: 1952-1976," p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> An example can be seen in the *Election night broadcast*, Nov. 6, 1984, KABC, Los Angeles, Archives of the Museum of Television and Radio, New York City

<sup>7</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 9, 1960, p. 7; Nov. 8, 1972, p. 5B;

<sup>8</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1952, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Art Buchwald, "An election supper to watch returns? How about brunch?" *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1984, p. 2-C. Election returns are mentioned in a 1940 ad in the *Bulletin*, Nov. 4, 1940, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Nov. 7, 1984, p. 14-A.

<sup>11</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 8, 1972, p. 5B.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1960, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1964, p. 7

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1972, p. 5B.

- <sup>16</sup> *Campaign '92: Election Night*, CBS, Nov. 4, 1992, CBS news transcripts, Burrelle's Information Services. For an analysis of the Fleetwood Mac song on "selling" Clinton as a boomer President, see Robin Andersen, "The Commercial Politics of the 1996 U.S. Presidential Campaign," in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, eds. Robin Andersen and Lance Strate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- <sup>17</sup> "Musicians scheduled to perform at the Presidential candidates' events tonight," Transcript. *NPR'S Morning edition*, Nov. 7, 2000. Copyright National Public Radio.
- <sup>18</sup> Bohn, "Election returns, 1952-1976" pp. 151-153.
- <sup>19</sup> As late as the mid-60s, political scientist Edward Banfield felt comfortable in describing both major newspapers in Philadelphia, *The Inquirer* and *The Evening Press*, as Republican in national and state politics, although not necessarily in municipal politics, see Banfield, *Big city politics* (New York: Random House, 1965) p. 117.
- <sup>20</sup> The development of norms of objectivity is recounted in Schudson, *Discovering the news*, pp. 121-169 and *passim*; Prior to *The Inquirer's* endorsement of Jimmy Carter in 1980, the paper had endorsed only one Democratic presidential candidate in its entire history, when in 1964 it came out for Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater. Since that year, it has not endorsed a Republican Presidential candidate, although it has endorsed Republicans for other offices.
- <sup>21</sup> *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*. Public Broadcasting System. Nov. 6, 1984. Archives of The Museum of Television and Radio: New York City.
- <sup>22</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: the live broadcasting of history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) pp. 33-36.
- <sup>23</sup> Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action," in *Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948).
- <sup>24</sup> Stossel, "Echo Chamber of horrors," p. 21.
- <sup>25</sup> As a comparison, the largest ever television audience for an American Super Bowl was 138.5 million (for Super Bowl XXX), and the largest audience for a regularly scheduled television episode was 125 million, for the final episode of MASH. *Guinness World Book of Records: 2002* (New York: Bantam, 2002) pp. 222, 342.
- <sup>26</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 132-138.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139; Bohn, "Election returns, 1952-1976," pp. 142-144.
- <sup>28</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 132-139; Bohn, "Broadcasting Election Returns, 1952-1976," pp. 142, 143.
- <sup>29</sup> TV journalists' battle for legitimacy is recounted in Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the body: the Kennedy assassination, the media, and the struggle of collective memory* (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1992) p. 27-29. Also, a personal account of television's struggle to achieve "parity" with print journalism is recounted in Sig Mickelson, *From Whistle Stop to Sound Bite: Four decades of Politics and Television* (New York: Praeger, 1989) pp. 49-53
- <sup>30</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 1, 1948, p. 1; *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1956, p. 31, society section.
- <sup>31</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, 131-139; Bohn, "Election returns, 1952-1976," pp. 144-46.
- <sup>32</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 151-155; Bohn, "Election returns, 1952-1976," pp. 151-13.
- <sup>33</sup> Robert Pepper, "Election Night 1972: TV Network Coverage," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 1973, 18(1), Table 1.
- <sup>34</sup> See George Will's commentary on *Election night broadcast*, Nov. 6, 1984, KABC(ABC), Los Angeles, Archives of the Museum of Television and Radio, New York City. See also *The Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1984, p. 5A.
- <sup>35</sup> *Election night broadcast*, Nov. 6, 1984, KABC (ABC), Los Angeles, and *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*. Public Broadcasting System. Nov. 6, 1984, Archives of the Museum of Television and Radio, New York City.
- <sup>36</sup> An example of the concession speech in the print age can be found in *The Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1940, p.1. For an example of the televised concession, see Walter Mondale in *Election night broadcast*, Nov. 6, 1984, KABC (ABC), Los Angeles, MT&R.
- <sup>37</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 12; *Daily News*, Nov. 4, 1936, p. 17.

- <sup>38</sup> "President-elect George W. Bush Makes his acceptance speech from the floor of the Texas House of Representatives," *The Early Show*, CBS, Dec. 14, 2000, CBS News Transcripts.
- <sup>39</sup> For Matthews' comments on Gore's speech, see "Chris Matthews' Hardball," Dec. 13, 2000, CNBC News transcripts. Also *The Today Show*, Dec. 14, 2000, NBC News Transcripts.
- <sup>40</sup> *Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1940, p. 3. The next day, the paper had an article lauding the formation of "Good loser" clubs by businessmen in Oregon and elsewhere in the nation, *ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 16.
- <sup>41</sup> *Record*, Nov. 6, 1940, p. 3A, and *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1960, p. 7.
- <sup>42</sup> John M. Cummings, "Hope those Nimrods Stopped to Vote First," *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1956, p. 36. For other nostalgic descriptions of the polling place, see *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1984, p. 11A, and *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1988, p. 21A.
- <sup>43</sup> See Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," p. 18, re: the construction of the voter through "mere number," and its political ramifications.
- <sup>44</sup> Bohn, "Election Night Coverage: 1952-1976," pp. 146, 147; *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1964, p. 7.
- <sup>45</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 133, 134.
- <sup>46</sup> *Election night broadcast*, Nov. 6, 1984, KABC (ABC), Los Angeles, archives of the Museum of Television and Radio, New York City.
- <sup>47</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 8, 2000, p. 26A.
- <sup>48</sup> Littlewood, *Calling Elections*, pp. 121-124.
- <sup>49</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 1968, p. 6.
- <sup>50</sup> Bohn, "Election night coverage: 1952-1976," pp. 146, 147.
- <sup>51</sup> Scott Stossel, "Echo Chamber of Horrors," *The American Prospect*, Dec. 18, 2000, p. 19; and the discussion of Kathleen Frankovic in *Electing the President, 2000*, eds. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 125-128.
- <sup>52</sup> This is the criticism made by Stossel, "Echo Chamber of Horrors," p. 19.
- <sup>53</sup> J.E. Jackson, "Election night reporting and voter turnout," *American journal of political science*, 1983, 27(4) 615-53 is an academic study of the return problem. For coverage of the debate over early returns, see Sharon D. Moshavi, "Elections enter new television age," *Broadcasting*, Nov. 2, 1992, p. 14.
- <sup>54</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1964, p. 7.
- <sup>55</sup> Jackson, "Election night reporting and voter turnout," p. 616, recounts the argument.
- <sup>56</sup> "We like to think no mere machine or set of mathematical formulas can tell what we unpredictable humans are going to do," *The Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1952, p. 20. See the remarks of Walter Mondale in *ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1984, p. D1.
- <sup>57</sup> *The Arizona Republic*, Nov. 8, 2000, p. EX2.
- <sup>58</sup> For discussions about the potential effects of the Internet on electoral politics in the United States, see W. Russell Neuman, Political Communications Infrastructure, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1996, volume 546(July) pp. 9-21; Jacob Weisberg, The Net's 1960? *Slate Magazine*, Sept. 14, 1999. [http://slate.msn.com/netelection/entries/99-09-14\\_34450.asp](http://slate.msn.com/netelection/entries/99-09-14_34450.asp)
- <sup>59</sup> See Jack Shafer, "Press Box breaks exit poll embargo," *Slate Magazine*, Feb. 1, 2000: URL. <http://slate.msn.com/code/PressBox/PressBox.asp?Show=2/1/00&idMessage=4517> and Shafer, "Get yer early exit-poll numbers here!," *Slate Magazine*, Feb. 18, 2000: URL. <http://slate.msn.com/code/PressBox/PressBox.asp?Show=2/18/2000&idMessage=4634>
- <sup>60</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1976, p. 16A
- <sup>61</sup> The use of McLuhan to criticize modern political culture can be found, for example, in Neil Postman, *Amusing ourselves to death: public discourse in the age of show business* (New York: Penguin, 1986). Other critiques are in, for example, Daniel Boorstin, *The image: a guide to pseudo-events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961); and Guy Debord, *Society of the spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).
- <sup>62</sup> Todd Gitlin and Robert McChesney have both used the notion of television as instrument of political and cultural hegemony. See Gitlin, *Inside Prime time* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); *The Whole World is Watching: news media in the making and unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, CA: University of

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California Press, 1980); McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: communication politics in dubious times* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 3, 2000, p. A27; *The Washington Post*, Oct. 4, 2000, p. A16.

<sup>64</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1952, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Brinkley's quotes can be found in *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 7, 1996, p. 1A.

<sup>66</sup> The portrayal of Bush as lacking intelligence often relied on his difficulties speaking in public. See for example Mark Crispin Miller, *The Bush Dyslexicon: observations on a national disorder* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001)

<sup>67</sup> Murray Edelman, *Constructing the political spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) pp. 37 ff; also Michael Warner, "The Mass public and the mass subject," In *Habermas and the public sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), in particular, Warner's discussion of the concept of the "Egocrat," taken from the work of Claude Lefort. p. 387 ff.

<sup>68</sup> Warner, "The mass public and the mass subject," pp. 395, 396; an especially noteworthy attack on the Reagan phenomenon from the cultural left comes in J. G. Ballard, "Why I want to Fuck Ronald Reagan," in *The Best Short Stories of J.G. Ballard* (New York: Grove Press, 1972) in which the image of the candidate undergoes various acts of physical dismemberment and sexual violence on videotape. A softer satire came in the form of "Ronnie Headrest," a computer generated character in the *Doonesbury* comic strip, based on similar character, "Max Headroom," popular in advertisements in the 1980s: Garry Trudeau, *Flashbacks: Twenty-five years of Doonesbury* (New York: Andrews McMeel, 1996). In either case, the implication was that Reagan's personality was wholly a product of the mass media, that in effect the President did not exist apart from the scripted, televised image of his handlers.

<sup>69</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 2, 1980, p. 6L.

<sup>70</sup> *McNeil/Lehrer Newshour*, Nov. 6, 1984, *op cit*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1960, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> As noted in *Inquirer*, Nov. 6, 1984, p. 6E.

<sup>73</sup> The issue of "street money" is raised in *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1980, p. 8A. Although something of an open secret, the question of street money could not be addressed publicly. In 1994, Edward Rollins, campaign manager for New Jersey Governor Christie Todd Whitman, created a national scandal when he told reporters that the Whitman campaign had paid street money out to Democratic party workers in order to depress voter turnout for Whitman's opposition. See *The Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 11, 1993, p. 17A, and *Inquirer*, Dec. 20, 1993, p. A1.

<sup>74</sup> See *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1980, p. 6A and Nov. 5, 1984, p. 6A.

<sup>75</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Why Americans don't vote* (New York: Pantheon, 1989[1988]). Seymour M. Lipset, *Political man* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) Table 1, p. 189, also Jack C. Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, *Non-voters: America's no shows* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999). Micah L. Sifry, "Finding the lost voters," *The American Prospect*, January 31, 2000, p. 25; See Walter Dean Burnham, "Party systems and the political process," in *The American Party systems: stages of political development*, W. N. Chambers and W. D. Burnham, (Eds.), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Ruy Teixeira, *Why American's don't vote: turnout decline in the United States, 1960-1984* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 4, 1952, p. 20; *ibid.*, Nov., 5, 1956, p. 2; *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1984, p. 14A.; *ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1992, p. A17.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1952, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1964, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1976, p. 9A.

<sup>80</sup> For a scholarly look at the lack of knowledge in the American electorate nationally, see Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans know about politics and why it matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>81</sup> See *Inquirer*, Nov. 5, 1972, on worries about the lack of knowledge among young voters.

<sup>82</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1996, p. A3.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1996, p. A11.

## **Chapter Nine: Election Day 2000**

Election Day, 2000, took place after a fall campaign that did not definitively establish a leader, with the two candidates virtually neck and neck on the eve of the vote. Polls in the several weeks before the vote had given Bush a slight but consistent edge, always within the margin of error. On Election Day, papers raised the possibility that the candidate who won the popular vote might not win the Electoral College vote, a situation that had not occurred since 1876. Another, even more disturbing possibility was that the Bush and Gore might tie in the Electoral College, thereby throwing the decision to the Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the closeness of the race, and due as well to Bush's strength in the West and most of the Southern states, three large Eastern states—Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Florida—were considered keys to victory. Gore needed to win all three to have a realistic chance at Electoral College victory. Many commentators doubted the vice president could do this, especially since Bush's brother Jeb, the governor of Florida, was expected to put the full force of the state's Republican party behind an Election Day get-out-the-vote-effort. The two other key states also had powerful Republican governors—Tommy Thompson in Michigan and Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania. Moreover, after running behind Gore much of September, Bush had managed to demonstrate that slight but consistent lead in the polling data. The weekend before Election Day, several stories in the press took on the character of a Gore campaign post-mortem, analyzing how the vice president had managed to lose the race.<sup>2</sup>

At 7 pm, as polls closed in the East, and Election night broadcasts began to report the returns, the results were generally as expected. Bush was taking most of the southern states, Gore most of the Northeastern ones. Early on, all three key eastern states—Florida, Pennsylvania, and Michigan—were declared “too close to call” by the networks. This again, was as expected. Gore’s first piece of good news came around 8 pm EST, when the networks began to project him the winner in Michigan. About 8:45, following the advice of VSN, the networks called Florida for Gore, who was also running ahead in the Pennsylvania count. Shortly 9 pm EST, the networks called Pennsylvania for Gore.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, the tone of the Election night coverage began to change. As CNN commentator Jeff Greenfield put it, it now became increasingly difficult to see how Bush could take the Presidency. Perhaps for this reason, many of the Republicans interviewed by the networks began to challenge the projections, in particular the Florida call. Well-known GOP campaign worker Mary Matalin argued that the networks had not taken into account the large absentee vote in the state, which she claimed would tend heavily Bush. Interviewed by television reporters, the candidate himself said that he still felt he could win Florida, based on information from his brother. Newscasters and commentators dismissed these claims as partisan pleadings. They pointed to the past success of their projections as proof of their accuracy.<sup>4</sup>

All the same, the popular totals in Florida continued to narrow. It appeared that Republican claims about the large absentee vote were correct. Just before 10 pm, the networks made a momentous decision. They decided to rescind the earlier projection,



and put Florida back in play. Since the rest of the nation was going pretty much as expected, with Gore taking the East and the northern mid-west, Bush the high plains states, the national race increasingly looked as though it would be decided in Florida. This was good news for Bush, who gradually began to creep toward Gore in the Florida vote count, then passed him. By 2:16 in the morning, with most of the vote Florida vote counted but with less than two thousand votes separating the two candidates, networks began calling the state, and the nation, for Bush. Crowds assembled outside the governor's mansion in Austin began to cheer, and Vice President Gore readied himself to telephone a concession.<sup>5</sup>

However, at this point, Gore's vote totals began to inch back toward Bush's. Network anchors grew increasingly, and visibly, nervous at the possibility that they might have to rescind the state a second time. Meanwhile, reports were beginning to trickle into the networks of voting irregularities in Florida. The reports centered on a district in West Palm Beach, home to a large community of retirees. Totals from these precincts indicated a large number of votes for third-party candidate Patrick Buchanan, a strange result indeed from this heavily Jewish district, given Buchanan's revisionist notions about American involvement in the Second World War. Residents told reporters that the ballots used in the voting booths at West Palm Beach, so-called "butterfly ballots," were confusing. Some of these residents added that, although they had intended to vote for Gore, they feared that they might have voted for Buchanan.<sup>6</sup>

By around 3:50 am, most major news networks decided that they would have to bite the bullet and indeed rescind the Florida call, therefore also rescinding Bush's

Presidency projection. Arguably, the damage to Gore's Presidential hopes had already been done. By prematurely declaring Bush President-elect, the news media had in effect created a presumption in American public opinion that Bush was the winner of the election. This in turn made the Democrats' fight for votes in the Florida recount seem like so much poor sportsmanship, and hampered Gore's attempt to force a hand count.<sup>7</sup> Republicans had their own set of accusations about the Election night gaffe. The first call for Florida, giving the state to Gore, may have dissuaded some Republican voters in the western panhandle to stay home, therefore taking votes away from Bush.<sup>8</sup>

Controversies were not to end with debates over the news media's performance. In the next weeks, criticisms would be raised against Florida's Election Day result on two fronts. One set of voters, including those in West Palm Beach, argued that they had been effectively disenfranchised by the confusing nature of the ballot given to them. Another group, composed mostly of minority and immigrant voters, claimed that they had not been allowed to vote because their names had illegally been purged from the rolls. Minority group advocates also noted that ballots in areas with heavy minority populations tended to be disproportionately disqualified. Since all of these groups tended to vote Democratic, Gore partisans claimed that the state's voting machinery had systematically worked against their man.<sup>9</sup>

The charges and countercharges eventually became so confusing that the case wound up in the Supreme Court. A rushed judgment, and a vote along strictly right-left lines resulted in a split ruling that effectively gave the Presidency to Bush. This

ruling, combined with the controversies over disfranchisement in Florida, and then combined with the fact that Gore had won the popular vote and yet lost the Presidency, led many Democrats to charge that Republicans had “stolen” the election. Even before the race was decided, many commentators wondered how any President was to rule such an obviously divided nation. The phrase “blue and red America” gained currency in the political vocabulary, referring to the numerous Election night maps showing a clear geographical split between Democrat and Republican supporters. These geographic divisions were assumed to mirror similar cultural, ethnic, and racial divisions: the split between white and black, urban and rural, etc.<sup>10</sup>

This is a rough sketch of Election night 2000, and the several scandals it provoked. In general, these scandals fall into four general categories:

*The distortions of the media:* At one point in the Election night broadcast on CNN, anchor Judy Woodruff went to reporter John King, covering the Gore campaign from the campaign’s celebration party in Memphis. In the midst of the interview, Woodruff interrupted King to ask about the droning in the background, outside the headquarters. King, looking somewhat sheepish, replied, “well, that’s me, actually.” The campaign had set up a large television screen to keep the celebrants in Memphis up to date on the race. The screen was tuned to CNN. Thus as King was reporting back to the central news station in New York, his words were almost immediately looped back to the site of the report: King’s comments on his own remarks were played backed to the

crowd, which cheered them, which cheer in turn was caught by the television cameras, as so on, mimicking a sort of hellish, Borgesian circle of political minutiae.<sup>11</sup>

The scene was emblematic of the hyper-reflective nature of the Election night broadcast, as the message going out from the networks affected what happened on the ground, which was then reported by the networks, and so forth. There were at least two points where the media's reporting in effect could have changed the Election Day event. The first was the decision to call Florida before the polls in the far western part of the state had closed, thereby reducing voter turnout, thereby affecting the outcome of the very race the news media were projecting. The second was the decision to call Florida for Bush when the voter totals were probably still too close to justify the step, thereby creating a public impression that Bush had won before all appropriate legal and institutional steps had been taken. VNS's faulty analysis cannot be blamed here, since the service never called the race for Bush: the networks did. Journalist Scott Stossel, writing for the left-leaning magazine *The American Prospect* during the Florida debate, proposed that the man who had first made the call was John Ellis, head of the Fox News Network's Election night effort. The rest of the networks, in the attempt not to be scooped, then quickly followed Fox's lead, Stossel argued. What made the role of Ellis significant was that he was not only an avowed conservative, but the cousin of George Bush as well.<sup>12</sup> Several months after this, Democratic Congressman Henry Waxman, in hearings about the Election night debacle, asked NBC news president about a rumor that Jack Welch, chairman of General Electric, which owns NBC, had been seen on the network's Election night set, asking reporters

to call the election for Bush. NBC denied any such influence on the part of Welch, but also refused Waxman's request for the network's videotape of the night's events.<sup>13</sup>

There is nothing new, or particularly surprising, in the notion that the news media create the reality upon which they then report. This is arguably why they exist. Nor is it surprising that this socially constructed reality is often controlled, either overtly or covertly, by the rich, the powerful, and those well connected to the rich and powerful. If the distortions and constructions on an Election night deserve special mention, it would be for two reasons. First, the amount of time during which events takes place is so small, and the amount of information so great, that Election night offers no opportunity for human actors to reflect on what they are doing, to correct themselves. (Part of the cause of the second false call for Florida may have lain in the nervousness and shock produced by the first mistake.) The second reason this claim is different from other, similar claims is that Election Day is a unique moment in a representative democracy. For almost a century, Americans had been working toward a certain vision of how the voting process ought to work, trying to get party bosses and urban machines from interfering with the people's wishes. Now, when the process had seemed complete, it seemed that this vision was being threatened.

*The failure of technology:* Undoubtedly, one reason the various institutions distorted the Election night picture was that technology failed, and in a number of instances. In the first place the polling data, and its subsequent analysis, was flawed. Exit polling can only take account of voters who venture to the polls. It says nothing about

absentee voters who mailed in their ballots. In an age when absentee voting was becoming a more and more popular method of voting, this was an obvious deficiency, since VNS's analysis clearly did not take the large number of absentee ballots into their projections.<sup>14</sup>

The other area where technology failed, or at least was seen to have failed, was in the voting booth itself, in the form of the confusing butterfly ballots. This was not, or at least should not have been, much of a surprise. As early as 1987, a federal judge had already ruled that the Votomatic's confusing ballot style put those voters who used the machine at a disadvantage from those who did not. The butterfly-style, Votomatic system had failed in numerous elections since its introduction in the mid-1960s, many of the problems coming in the counting of ballots after the vote. (This is arguably a more serious problem than the West Palm Beach incident, since it lay in the system's failure to correctly record the voter's wishes, rather than a failure on the part of the voter to correctly indicate those wishes.)<sup>15</sup>

But whatever evils there may be with the operation of the Votomatic or other butterfly-style machines, it is probably an unfortunate fact that no ballot system in the United States is without flaws. One of the major reasons is that voting is a far more complicated affair in the U.S. than in most other Western democracies. It demands more from voters because the number of offices and initiatives on the ballot is much greater than in parliamentary-style elections, for example, where the voter must decide only one office. The informational challenge presented to the American voter by the secret ballot is the result of its extreme democratic nature.<sup>16</sup>

In part because of the inherent complicating factor of the large ballot, and in part because no human technology is completely without flaws, flaws that are inevitably magnified when performed millions of times over, voting will inevitably create problems on Election Day. Similarly, the demand for horse-race coverage, combined with the telescoped time-frame of the modern Election Day, also suggests that mistakes on projections are inevitable, if not inevitability as severe as those on Election night 2000. Any national Election Day requires modern technological forms in order to work at all, and yet that very technology will also ensure that Election Day will always be problematic. To be sure, the institutional specifics of Election Day 2000 aggravated the situation. In particular, the decision to use a single center to provide the number and analysis to all news outlets meant for no institutional checks. The lack of legal sanction against delivering early projections, before the polls in western Florida closed, probably also contributed to the problem. Yet no institutional changes can ensure an error-free Election Day.

*The inequality at the polling booth:* It has been an argument running throughout this dissertation that part of the importance of the vote on Election Day is that it serves as a public marker of distinction for the voter. Bestowing the privilege of the vote on the voter is a public acknowledgement that he or she is a fully rational, fully capable and competent political agent. This is one reason why groups lacking full citizenship in the nation have made the struggle for the vote a central aspect of their struggle for equal rights. Denial of the vote to any group of citizens—women, African Americans in the

post-Reconstruction South, or Asian Americans somewhat later—is a public denial of that group’s full membership in society.

The other central fact of the vote is that it equalizes the voice of the citizen. It is a declaration, an enactment of equality. The vote declares that no citizen’s opinion is to count more than any other in the most important decisions of the body politic, its choice of leaders. Because of this declaration, and because of the ideological importance of equality in America democracy generally, the possibility that equality does *not* obtain between citizens strikes at the heart of the celebration. A general assumption among American social scientists is that universal suffrage took hold there much earlier than in most countries. As Alexander Keyssar had written, that understanding is largely a myth. Universal suffrage cannot be said to have become an institutionalized fact until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. At that point, the problem of universal, equal suffrage seemed largely solved. But the events in Florida belied this. There was first of all the problem with the butterfly ballots. If it was true that the difficulties of the ballot led to a greater likelihood that this type of ballot would be disqualified, then equality of voices did not hold. Moreover, several minority groups suggested that largely African American districts were more likely to be disqualified than in largely white district, and some journalists reported that large numbers of African American voters and lower income white voters had been illegitimately purged from voting lists. Because these voters were likely Democratic voters, and because the administration responsible for purging the lists was run by the Republican candidate’s brother, it was easy enough for Democrats to read the purged



lists as a political maneuver, aimed at stripping one of the fundamental rights of citizenship from a single group of Americans.<sup>17</sup>

*The inconclusiveness of the result:* The fundamental task of any Election Day is to provide a clear picture to the population of its mind. It was on this score that Election Day 2000 failed most spectacularly. This failure cannot be credited only to the corruption or the incompetence of Election Day institutions, in Florida or in the nation. The simple fact was that, with a difference of less than 500 votes out of nearly 6,000,000 cast in Florida, and given the various in counting standards and voting technologies used throughout the state, it was practically impossible to state with any degree of confidence who had “really” won that state’s Electoral votes, and thus won the election. Extensive examinations into the result following the election were generally inconclusive, or contradictory, about the result. Most continued to give Bush a slight lead, but also highlighted the often contradictory standards used in determining valid from invalid ballots.<sup>18</sup>

The theoretical possibility that a single vote could sway an entire election has always been an element in the justification given for voting. As rational choice theorists have shown, however, this is a rather slim reed upon which to rationalize the decision, since in most Presidential elections the difference in vote totals numbers in the thousands or tens of thousands. One vote does not, literally, make the difference, whatever the civic catechism of representative democracy holds.<sup>19</sup> It did not in Florida, either, but it came considerably closer than on most other occasions. In fact,

the central problem with the Florida count was precisely the fact that the totals were so close. Florida was not the only state with problematic election machinery. As subsequent news stories showed, problems were evident throughout the nation.<sup>20</sup> But these were not so severe that they threatened to override the actual result. The paradoxical fact is that American election institutions probably work well enough when the result is not close, that is, when the individual voter's decision to go the polls makes no rational sense. It is only in the occasions when an individual vote really might make the difference that the institutional structure is inadequate to the task.

Conclusion:

The central function of an election for President is to create a leader, a symbol, around which all members of the nation, including those supporting the losing side, can unite. The winning President becomes a unifying symbol inasmuch as he can claim to reflect the People's Will. Because Election Day 2000 failed so spectacularly in this, it is easy to see it as a moment with few precedents—perhaps 1824 or 1876. It is also easy to see it as the culmination of several trends that plagued late twentieth-century Election Days—the increasing power of the mass media, problems with the ballot and voting machines, the increasing ability of an economic elite to control the country's politics through manipulation of messages, the scandal of early projections.

But in another way, Election Day 2000 is not so much a refinement of trends, an omen of the future, as it was a throwback to an earlier time. Despite its failures, in a sense because of them, Election Day 2000 outlined the divisions within the nation in

much the same way that earlier Election Days had done. It also brought back politics to Election Day and to the act of voting. Access to the polls became politicized, control over information about the returns became politicized, and most famously, the Supreme Court's decision to stop the recount and essentially give the vote to George Bush was widely perceived as a politicized act. Perhaps because of this politicization, the lines between citizens began to harden, almost to the point of violence. Republican and Democratic supporters clashed in Florida's streets, and outside the office of the Miami's election commissioners. Old friends refused to talk. Polls captured the degree to which Americans experienced, in effect, two different events. Democrats called the election a "stolen" election, regarded George Bush as the thief in the White House. Republicans thought of Al Gore as a poor loser who, by his failure to concede graciously, threw the nation into upheaval.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Election Day 2000 was not simply the pivotal point in one Election, it was the hinge upon which two quite different election campaigns swung. The first campaign was a typical late twentieth century Presidential campaign. It lacked passion, provoked worries over media-centric candidates, raised fears that the two major parties were not in any essential respect all that different, and thus did not offer the electorate any real choice, and provided a great deal of hand wringing over the generally shallow nature of modern American democracy. Once Election Day was over, and a victor not yet announced, a whole different campaign sprang up. This was a campaign for public opinion and in the courts, and because it could not be put to a vote, necessarily ended in an unsatisfactory manner. With each side convinced that the

others were illegitimately attempting to “steal” the election, a great deal of partisanship, passion, and bad feeling was created in the month following Election Day.

Rituals are supposed to bring a group back together, to provide an image of unity and concord, as the Election of 1940 did for many in the city of Philadelphia. The 2000 Election could not do this, because it could not convince the losers that they had truly lost, and that their duty was therefore to concede graciously. A December, 2000, CBS poll found that a vast majority of Democrats thought that the Republicans had stolen the election.<sup>22</sup> The percentages for African American Democrats was even higher than for Democrats generally.<sup>23</sup> By the time that the Supreme Court had decided on a winner, journalists were voicing doubts about the efficacy not simply of a modern vote but of the American system:

The country wants to see the loser reconciled to the winner and given a consoling pat on the back. It wants an affirmation that the system worked as promised, that the machinery of democracy is still running more or less smoothly. I'm afraid that I can't endorse that conclusion. Not because the wrong guy won, but because the system really did fail. No we didn't face a deep crisis or a Third-World-style succession struggle. But a system that cannot generate confidence that the winner actually won is more than a system that hiccuped. It's a system that choked.<sup>24</sup>

The “Florida fiasco” was symptomatic of the whole modern electoral process in the United States, Weisberg wrote: a perpetual campaign suffused with money, a malfunctioning primary system that invested all the power in the hands of a few small states, full of misleading 30-second ads and “thin, paltry” news coverage<sup>25</sup> Lest anyone think that the fault lay only in Florida, and not the nation, *The Los Angeles*

*Times* published an investigative study outlining how the deficient voting practices highlighted in the Sunshine State were a problem throughout the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Others, while equally scathing about the unsightly spectacle unraveling in full public view, were more optimistic about its eventual effect. For Neal Gabler, writing on the op-ed page of the *Time*, there was some essentially positive about all the disenchantment. Election Day 2000 certainly helped to “demystify” and thus “delegitimize” the idea of the vote as some pure route to democracy, Gabler allowed. Given the mood of the times, the need of the modern media culture to show audiences the hidden workings of what lay behind the curtain of public spectacle, something like the Florida mess was bound to come to light sooner or later. But since Election Day was a sham anyway, a kind of “pseudo-event,” in fact “the biggest pseudo-event of all,” this was not such a bad thing. “The power of demystification is that it serves as the great equalizer,” Gabler wrote. It was “another kind of empowerment, the kind that said we were too smart to get fooled again.”<sup>27</sup> Election Day 2000 was a strange, star-crossed event, caused by a series of problematic decisions and unusual occurrences. And yet, as the last Election Day in a century that had seen the ritual of the election itself come increasingly under attack, it was perhaps an appropriate way for Philadelphians, and other Americans, to signal an end to an era.

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<sup>1</sup> *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 2000, p. A13.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the state’s Gore needed to win, see the election night analysis of ABC’s Terry Moran, circa 7 pm, *ABC 2000: The Vote*, Nov. 7, 2000, Burrelle’s News Transcripts. For a “pre-mortem” of the Gore campaign, see for example, Michael Kinsley, “Down to the wire: it was Gore’s to lose, will he?” *San Diego Tribune*, Nov. 5, 2000, p. G1. Also the comments of Mark Shields reported in the introduction to *Electing the President, 2000*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *ABC 2000: The Vote*, Nov. 7, 2000, Burrelle’s News Transcripts. The times for the Florida calls are from Stossel, “Echo chamber of horrors,” p. 18.

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<sup>4</sup> Greenfield's analysis and Matalin's argument can be found in *CNN Live Event/Special Presentation*, Nov. 7, 2000. eMediaMillworks, Inc.

<sup>5</sup> *The New York Times*, Nov. 9, 2000, p. A1.

<sup>6</sup> *ABC 2000: The Vote*, Nov. 8, 2000, Burrelle's News Transcripts

<sup>7</sup> Stossel, "Echo chamber of horrors," p. 20. See also the discussion between Robert Shrum, Stanley Greenberg and Kathleen Hall Jamieson in *Electing the President 2000*, pp. 116-118. A general account of the events of Election Day 2000 can be found in Jeffrey Toobin, *Too close to call* (New York: Random House, 2001) pp. 9-25.

<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 2000, p. A32. It should be noted that the evidence provided by Republican lawmakers for suppression of the vote in Florida was anecdotal, and that the polls in the panhandle area of the state closed only 11 minutes after the first network projection for Al Gore. Jake Tapper, *Down and Dirty: the plot to steal the presidency* (New York: Little, Brown, 2001) p. 26. For differing opinions about the effects of the early call on turnout, both in Florida and states in the West and Midwest, compare the comments of Henry Brady and Karl Rove, *Electing the President, 2000*, pp. 136, 137, 141, 142. A general discussion of the networks' practice of predicting winners in states is in *ibid.*, pp. 136-143.

<sup>9</sup> See *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2000, p. A14, and Tapper, *Down and Dirty*, p. 7, 12 for discussions of how Florida's electoral machinery might have worked, either intentionally or unintentionally, to disenfranchise black voters and other minorities.

<sup>10</sup> The on-line magazine titled its ongoing coverage of politics following the Florida controversy "Red vs. Blue." See for example, [http://www.salon.com/directory/topics/red\\_vs\\_blue/index.html](http://www.salon.com/directory/topics/red_vs_blue/index.html)

<sup>11</sup> Stossel, "Echo chamber of horrors," p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20. Tapper, *Down and Dirty*, p. 32, and David Kaplan, *The Accidental President* (New York: William Morrow, 2001) p. 10 both mention Ellis's relationship to Bush, but do not suggest that the Fox news head might have intentionally made the call. Kaplan, in fact, explicitly discounts the idea.

<sup>13</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 11, 2001, p. A1.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, Nov. 9, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Dugger, "Annals of Democracy: counting the votes," p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Schudson, *The good citizen*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> The most complete coverage of these claims can be found in several stories by Gregory Palast, a British journalist working in the United States. See "Florida's 'Disappeared voters,' disfranchised by the GOP," *The Nation*, Feb. 5, 2001; and, with Julian Borger, "Inquiry into news claims of poll abuses in Florida," *The Guardian* (London), Feb. 17, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The claim that it was statistically impossible to know who really won the election was made by John Paulos, who suggested the fairest way to solving the Florida controversy would be to toss a commemorative "Gore-Bush" dime: "We're measuring bacteria with a yardstick," *The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2000, p. A27. Several news organizations looked extensively into the Florida recount and failed to come with any sort of conclusive argument about who really "won" the election. See *The New York Times*, July 15, 2001, pp. 1, 17; *USA Today*, May 11, 2001, pp. 1A, 2A.

<sup>19</sup> This point has been made repeatedly, by political scientists of varied political dispositions toward representative democracy. See Downs, *An economic theory of democracy*, pp. 265-71; Hirschbein, *Voting rites*, pp. 7-14, 35 ff. My use of the term civic catechism comes from Hirschbein. The difficulty of providing a rational argument for voting in a national election is reviewed in Green and Shapiro, *Pathologies of rational choice theory*, pp. 47-71.

<sup>20</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 11, 2000, p. A1 is a report of voting problems throughout the nation; *Inquirer*, Jan. 22, 2001, p. A1 focuses on Philadelphia.

<sup>21</sup> The case against George Bush, and the Supreme Court decision upholding his victory, is presented in Alan Dershowitz, *Supreme Injustice: how the high court hijacked election 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); press attacks on Al Gore can be found in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Nov. 26, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> PollingReport.com. "The Long Count." URL: [www.pollingreport.com/wh2post.htm](http://www.pollingreport.com/wh2post.htm).

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<sup>23</sup> Wendy W. Simmons, "Black Americans Feel 'Cheated' by Election 2000," Gallup news service. URL: [www.gallup.com/poll/release/pr001220.asp](http://www.gallup.com/poll/release/pr001220.asp)

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Weisberg, "The End," *Slate*, Dec. 14, 2000. URL: <http://slate.msn.com/BallotBox/BallotBox.asp?Show=12/14/2000&idMessage=6687>

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "A Modern Democracy that can't count votes," Dec. 11, 2000, p. A1; Mark Fazlollah, "City vote tally doesn't add up, review shows," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 22, 2001, p.A1, examines voting problems in Philadelphia specifically.

<sup>27</sup> Neal Gabler, "The Election: the Unveiling; Behind the Political Curtain," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2000, Section 4, p. 1.

## **Chapter Ten: Conclusion**

**In this dissertation I have presented the history of Election Day in Philadelphia. I chose to organize the narrative around the question of why a number of elements of the Election Day tradition in the city's past—bonfires, betting, parades, Election night crowds—disappeared from the day's events. I referred to this as the decline of the Election Day "celebration." That question was intended help answer a second question: what the experience of Election Day meant for those who participated in and observed it, what message it sent to the public about itself.**

**In order to help myself and the reader better understand the point that I wished to make about Election Day's role as public communication, I used the concept of ritual to frame this account of Election Day. Ritual was a useful term for this dissertation because of the fact, first of all, that rituals are publicly performed. The interest in ritual, from an anthropological or sociological point of view, is in how a group or a public uses this communication to make sense of its social life. In the Durkheimian tradition, ritual is also the form of communication through which the group communicates an image of itself to itself.<sup>1</sup> Thus it was appropriate to the issue that I wanted to address. How did this event communicate a vision of the public body to members of that public? How did it communicate the nature and the meaning of the public, and how did it communicate the boundaries of that public? My proposition was that the manner in which this ritual was practiced would influence how that public saw itself: in that sense, influence what that public was.**



Numerous democratic theorists, from de Tocqueville to Tarde to Dewey to Habermas, have emphasized how communication in a modern democracy works not simply to transmit ideas but to create the public itself. In Dewey's argument, to take an example, for a public to act as a public, it needs certain forms of communication—notably conversation and journalism—through which meaningful symbols are created and propagated.<sup>2</sup> More recently, writers in the field of cultural studies and cultural history have argued that mass public events—like public celebrations, festivals, or demonstrations—also play a significant role in communicating a vision of the public.<sup>3</sup> The English novelist John Berger, for example, has argued that popular demonstrations can be considered a sort of rehearsal, or a political metaphor, for a revolutionary public:

I say metaphor because the strength thus grasped transcends the potential strength of those present, and certainly their actual strength as deployed in a demonstration. The more people there are, the more forcibly they represent to each other and to themselves those who are absent. In this way a mass demonstration simultaneously extends and gives body to an abstraction. Those who take part become more positively aware of how they belong to a class. Belonging to that class ceases to imply a common fate, and implies a common opportunity. They begin to recognize that the function of their class need no longer be limited; that it, too, like the demonstration itself, can create its own function.<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the thrust of his analysis, Berger exempts from this claim what he calls “officially encouraged public spectacles,” a category under which he would presumably fit an Election Day, whether we consider a rally of a ward committee in downtown Philadelphia in the 1880s, or voters waiting in line to cast their ballots at a Fire Hall in the same city in 1996. Such spectacles lack the sense of a

“rehearsal” for the moment when the public breaks free of its masters in a revolutionary moment of freedom.<sup>5</sup> Although Berger does not explicitly say so, we are led to assume that the official public spectacle, rather than being critical of power, is instead simply a celebration of the status quo, managed by an elite ruling class.

The charge generally made against the public of Election Day is somewhat similar, namely that it is a *tamed* public. It is tamed because it implicitly agrees to the limits set upon it by the performance of the act of voting itself. The message is one of political *quiescence*, of *obedience* to the state of society as it exists, more or less, and an obedience to the very limited political role allotted to most members of the public. Citizenship becomes defined solely through the performance of this single act, taken at relatively rare intervals.<sup>6</sup> In this argument, elections and voting are the most important rituals in liberal democracies,

partly because of their central place in the official ideology of such societies, partly because of the high degree of mass participation they involve...Participation in elections can plausibly be interpreted as the symbolic affirmation of the voters' acceptance of the political system and of their role within it. The ritual of voting draws their attention to a particular model of 'politics,' of the nature of political conflict and the possibilities of political change. Moreover it both results from and reinforces the belief, in which there is normally little truth, that elections give them an influence over government policy.<sup>7</sup>

The public of Election Day is tamed as well because it accepts, again implicitly, the limits of political argument which electoral politics sets on public discussion. As a writer like Murray Edelman suggests, the form of that discussion is contrived to *produce* problems, not to *solve* them. The function of electoral politics under such a regime is simply to continue debates over problems that serve, primarily, to justify the

political spectacle itself. The role of the citizen is to watch the political spectacle, and occasionally to take the walk to the polls and provide a change in the cast of a never-ending melodrama.<sup>8</sup> Election Day and the act of voting, in short, provide the means by which a public living in a manifestly undemocratic polity is nonetheless able to tell itself that it is a democratic public. To the extent that the message is successful, the elite who govern safeguard themselves from the more radical demands that a truly powerful public might put forth.

The history that I have just presented presents a great deal of evidence consistent with such an interpretation. Throughout that history, and continuing to the present day, there has always existed a group of people who have had an inordinate amount of power to affect what happens on Election Day. Party or factional organizers and leaders have generally controlled who would be on the tickets—through informal meetings, the caucus, backroom deals, or more recently, through dominating the mass media's discussion of candidates. They have generally tried to set the terms of the debate of the issues and personalities. They have even, through their control of the various forms of media, attempted to determine a frame for the vote itself, one most consistent with their interests. The history of Philadelphia's Election Day can thus be read as a confirmation, of what critical scholars have known all along, although it is interesting that there was rarely a moment when some segment of the city's population did not in fact make the same sort of argument that these scholars now make: that the determination of tickets by caucus or the machine or the national leadership robbed them of the right to make up their own minds; that the limited choices on the ballot

made their vote, in some sense, meaningless. Moreover, these arguments were not made in marginal discourse, but often came through in mainstream media. If Election Day was simply a method of tricking the populace into a belief in the supreme rightness of modern democracy, it was not a very effective one. Many people were not conned.

Liberal defenders of the vote have a different theory of what an Election Day means. In the work of George Kateb, the message of the vote is not one of political obedience, but of political power.<sup>9</sup> What Kateb suggests is that the vote contains a message that critical scholars, mainstream political scholars, and perhaps even a great many would-be political puppet-masters, fail to realize. He argues that the simple fact of the citizenry's participation in regularly contested elections for political office will tend to cultivate certain habits of mind: a confidence, even arrogance, when dealing with political authority, for example, since that authority's legitimacy rests upon the consent of the citizen. Kateb does not believe these habits are restricted to behavior in the electoral realm. He suggests that they end up infecting the whole of social life within a liberal democracy.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of Election Day's message is also consistent with the narrative. Whatever description we might give of the public performance of Philadelphia's Republican electors on the day of the 1796 vote—as they let out cheers of “no King” walking to the voting booth, many of them, perhaps, in front of their Federalist employers—to argue simply that they were embodying a message of political acquiescence to some set of political masters is inadequate. The parades of

the 1880s, in which voters would march down Broad with the declaration on a banner that their ward had delivered a “2,000 majority for Hayes,” were not a celebration just of the candidate but of the public’s own role in creating political authority. The jeers of the Democratic mob before the nabobs of the Union League were not in support of the status quo, they were a celebration of the vote’s ability to give power, for this moment at least, to the common many over the rich few.

What this history suggests, in other words, is that Election Day has sent several messages, at the same time, to the voting public of Philadelphia. It has communicated an image of a public that is both obedient to its political leadership, and to the norms that keep this leadership in place, but not always under the terms, and not always with political and social implications, that the leadership might prefer. It has sent other messages as well. It has communicated an image of the public that both accepts and even values political debate and difference, but at the same time continually strives to exclude from its ranks those people and groups—whether defined by class, race, sex, or ideology—who seem *too* different. It has presented an image of the public as composed of rational individual voters, each arriving at their own independent decisions, while all the time explicitly displaying the importance of party, ethnic, religious, and racial membership in its performance.

Why would we expect it to be otherwise? Why would expect this ritual to send only a single message? We do not suppose other rituals from other cultures to be so simple and so easily read. Rather, one of the features of ritual is precisely this ability to communicate complicated, multi-vocal, and in fact often contradictory messages.

There is no reason that the central ritual of democratic life should be any different. Just as other rituals embody and illustrate, in appropriately public fashion, certain central tensions in a culture, so Election Day embodies certain central tensions that are at the heart of modern democratic life—between freedom and order, between the individual conscience and public obligation, between respect for a plurality of interests and the need for social cohesion, and between the celebration of personal excellence and the celebration of social equality.<sup>11</sup>

This is my first central claim: that Election Day in Philadelphia has, throughout its history, embodied the central tensions of the political culture in that city. The debates over the Election Day performance have, in turn, provided the engine for changing the style of that performance. They have not resulted in the disappearance of the problems embodied in Election Day: whether they have resulted in the partial amelioration of these problems is not for this study to answer. They have, at any rate, constantly rearranged those problems, reconfigured them. The debate over Election Day is one way for Philadelphians, and other Americans, to consider the central political principles that define their regime and define themselves as a public, not by debating them, but by performing them. It is the abstract tension between the freedom and equality given a concrete, human, and vivid form, presented for the whole of the population to see and consider.

Election Day is not simply when the political *understanding* of the community is enacted, however. It is also a moment when the political *boundaries* of that community are performed, when the question of who are in and who are outside the

community is decided. The result of the struggle over how to define Pennsylvania's political community in the 1830s was that black citizens and women found themselves excluded from this form of enacting political power. Election Day in Philadelphia, as a celebration of the city's public, has often been a celebration of racism, sexism, religious and ethnic prejudice, class inequality, and the power of money, because that public has defined itself, at least in part, through these features. The question is how debates over the public's political understanding of its character, as embodied in the Election Day performance, were transmitted into an understanding of the boundaries that composed it. In other words, what is the relation between the disappearance of the Election Day celebration and the nature of the boundaries that surround the modern voting public?

We should note, first of all, that such celebrations in the city of Philadelphia have always their chorus of disapprovers. Isaac Norris did not like the vulgar displays of emotion following Election Days in the 1720s (not even when they were by partisans of his own side). John Fenno was horrified by the "Jacobin" performances of political aggression in 1796. The editors of the *Public Ledger* disdained what they saw as the childish and irrational exertions of party men in the 1836 election, just as the editors of the *Inquirer* in the 1870s looked down upon night parades. There are two elements that seem to link such critiques. First, they do not clearly distinguish between what we might find colorful in the Election Day celebration—the transparencies, the bonfires, the cheering crowds, perhaps even the betting—and features such as bribery, rioting, vote manipulation, and the fights at the polling booth. Second, in the eyes of

the critics, the same people seemed to be a part of all of these practices. In the discourse of critics and reformers, those who drank too much on Election Day, those who accepted bribes, those who tended to vote unthinkingly along party lines, and those who celebrated with war whoops and bonfires, were generally people whose membership in the public was, for one reason or another, dubious—mechanics, Germans, foreigners, Catholic immigrants, blacks, children. The disapproval of the Election Day celebration was one way for the elite classes to voice their discomfort and their displeasure at the presence of so many apparently unqualified, low class, illiterate voters at the polls. Given the link made in the rhetoric between the corruption of Election Day and its celebration, the attack on one inevitably led to an attack on the other.

How was the disappearance of this celebration, and the elimination of this battle, accomplished, in the case of Philadelphia's Election Day? Changes in the mass media environment certainly had an effect on the Election Day celebration. Whereas it was the introduction of the telegraph that helped create the Election night crowd, by establishing partisan centers of information—clubs, newspapers—around which citizens could congregate, the introduction of later forms of technology helped to dissipate that crowd. First telephones—and perhaps, to a minor extent before that, the light shows that newspapers like the *Inquirer* and the *Press* used as Election night gimmicks—allowed residents to get information about the outcome of the Presidential race without having to venture to the city's center. This would have appealed to those citizens who did not care for the November winds in Philadelphia, or the occasional



rains, or for the company of many of the inebriated, aggressive, and coarse citizens one met in front of the Inquirer Building. The introduction of the radio further helped segregate the Election night celebration. The street was no longer the spot to congregate to hear about the news of the election. One could go to a bar, or a hotel lobby, or even get the news during the Intermission of a play. To the extent that the street crowd continued to figure into the Election night celebration, it did so as a space for spontaneous celebration of partisan victors, as in the celebrations of FDR's first three Presidential wins. Newspapers like the *Bulletin* continued to offer an electronic billboard for people in the street to get the latest news on the returns, but these crowds were no longer the center of attention for the next day's report on Election Day events. Instead, the press turned, increasingly, to analyzing what the results of the vote might mean for the country, and perhaps to recap the campaign. By the time that television had arrived, the street celebration was such a degraded copy of what it once had been that it disappeared relatively easily and quickly. The television offered everything that the radio return had offered, but added a visual element and the new technology of computers to present the audience with faster results and ever more elaborate dissections of the vote. Celebrations, to the extent that they continued to exist, moved into the private home, and friends gathered around the television to discuss the vote, and watched crowds in Center City hotels, or Little Rock, Arkansas, provide a sanitized version of the sort of celebrations that citizens themselves had conducted one hundred years earlier.

But the credit for the disappearance of the public Election Day celebration cannot be simply traced to the introduction of the electronic media. For one thing, those media did not eliminate other civic celebrations—the Mummers Day Parade, the Fourth of July. For another, the tradition of the Election Day celebration was more than the crowds around the newspaper buildings. It consisted, as well, of the bets that went on, of the bonfires, of the flags flown out of office buildings on the day of the vote, of the voters and observers that gathered around the polling places, of the ad hoc congregations on street corners, discussing the latest news on the race.

To explain the disappearance of these elements of the Election Day celebration, we need also to look at changes in laws, and changes in other practices of the political culture in which Election Day was one event among many. As to the laws, Pennsylvanians had attempted to control the behavior of the Election Day public since, almost, the founding of the commonwealth. In the colonial period, the Assembly passed laws forbidding the treating of voters, laws that moved the tumultuous election of Inspectors away from the Election Day proper, laws that established a voter list to better control illegal voting. They moved the polls off the Court House balcony, which made the voting process easier, inasmuch as it made its speedier. In the nineteenth century the legislature continued to pass laws attempting to control the Election Day celebration. In the early 1850s, the central polls at the State House were broken up, since the political leadership had decided that the location, in an era of strong partisan identification and keen competition, was too conducive to violence and corruption. But the move did not destroy the Election Day celebration, nor did it solve the

problems of bribery, violence, and other forms of vote manipulation. It simply rearranged them.

It was not until the later part of the nineteenth century that the opponents of the Election Day celebration began finally to win the war over their opponents. Laws made drinking on Election Day, bonfires, Election eve parades, illegal. The secret ballot was also an important tool. As a communication technology, the ballot had a far more decisive effect on Philadelphian's Election Day behavior than did the radio or the television, since it affected the central act of Election Day, the vote. The secret ballot went hand in hand with a new image of the voter, and of the public to which the voter belonged. That voting public became an increasingly abstract idea, vague in its outlines, composed of those who did not necessarily share any of one's social traits, or even one's political beliefs, but were simply good, informed citizens.

Other changes in the political culture worked in tandem with the vision of the public that the secret ballot implied. The elimination of the spectacular campaign, combined with the rise of the advertised candidate, changed the relation of the voter to electoral politics. The duty of the voter on Election Day became, to put into action the information that the campaign had managed to deliver. It was not to be a faithful party soldier in the war against political tyranny and corruption, as exemplified by the opposition.

Changes in mass media content were consonant with this difference. Slowly, the main media outlets in Philadelphia began to move away from the overt partisanship that nearly all of them had displayed in the nineteenth century. The

national television networks, reporting on the Presidential race, assumed a stance of neutrality. The *Inquirer* and the *Bulletin*, formerly dependable supporters of the Republican ticket, began to move away from that party in Presidential years, particularly with those candidates considered out of the mainstream—like Goldwater and Reagan. Election Day editorials no longer called upon the voter to vote the straight party ticket, but simply to vote, to do one's duty as a citizen. Discussion of the Election Day performance turned increasingly to worries about whether the voters were too disconnected from politics, too unknowledgeable about the issues and the offices, too lazy for the demands placed upon them. There were Election Day warnings, too, about the way that the mass media had turned politics into a vision of show business. These were, in a sense, another variation on worries over unreliable voters, voters who could not see past the sham of the media candidate (which is to say, people very much unlike the media analyst him or herself, or presumably, the reader of the article, who *could* pierce the deception).

By the 2000 Election Day, one editorial writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was so troubled about whether many voters were smart up to the job required of them, that he suggested they might just want to think about staying away:

What's the point of studying up on the candidates and voting if your ballot vote is going to be canceled out by some idiot who registered more or less by accident, and who's voting because some Anheuser-Busch ad told him to? (if only the ad had included a little slogan, such as "Budweiser—the one beer to have, when you're voting more than once.")

So if you don't feel like voting today, don't bother. You won't be missed. Let those of us who have been paying attention handle this one for you. Trust us. We know what we're doing.<sup>12</sup>

So what linked this modern Election Day public was not any sense of explicitly acknowledged social distinctions among its members but a set of criteria—political interest, knowledge, and public-spirited action—that members strove, often unsuccessfully, to meet. The voting public presented to the newspaper readers in Philadelphia would thus seem, at first glance, to be neutral as regards class, or race, or geography. But in fact, it has been clear for some time that the modern American voting public is skewed toward certain social characteristics. Non-voters tend to be, on the whole, poorer, younger, less well educated, less likely to own a home (and thus be settled, dependable citizens), and more likely to be non-white, than voters.<sup>13</sup>

Let's return to the observation, noted in the second chapter, that at least some segments of the modern voting population, while despairing of the vote's usefulness as a tool to produce political change, nevertheless choose to participate in Election Day. This is rather strange behavior: to undertake an act one feels will be useless. Unless the purpose of the act is not simply to affect a change in government policy, but to communicate some other message. A vote sends a number of different messages. It is, among other things, a public declaration that the voter is a legitimate and full member of the political community. It is also a declaration—to oneself and to the rest of the public—that one's voice on political matters ought to, and in fact does, count for something. Thus, it is not surprising that well-educated people from comfortable backgrounds are likely to choose to vote on Election Day, regardless their opinions of modern politics or politicians. Their vote is one of acknowledgement of their

importance, an affirmation of their tribal membership in the public that this ritual creates.

This is the second claim of this dissertation. The image of the public that is created through the Election Day ritual is one that serves to mark off members of that public, not only from citizens of other political communities, but from citizens of that community who do not vote. The experience of the modern Election Day declares that the voter is a member of a public that is distinct from, and in some sense superior to, the larger public that includes voters and non-voters alike. That smaller public, in the discourse of politics that surrounds the event, no longer defines itself through explicit class or racial divisions, but by a set of skills. Members of the voting public are simply assumed to be better, more dependable citizens, by virtue of their access to those skills, than those who are not. Naturally, they are the ones who exercise the most important message of power given to a democratic public: the ballot. Given the egalitarian mores of American society, in which political hierarchies are considered nefarious, this function of Election Day cannot be too explicitly performed. Hence, Election Day is a ritual of social solidarity and social exclusiveness that attempts to disguise the fact, by shedding as much of its explicitly symbolic trappings as possible, and by ridding itself, again to the extent possible, of its public character, so that its role as the ritual celebration, not of the people, but of only a subset of the people, does not become too much of a public scandal.

My argument about the disappearance of the Election Day celebration can be taken as an example or illustration of the larger argument, made by Carolyn Marvin

and David Ingle in *Blood sacrifice and the nation*, and by Marvin elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> about the relationship between textualized understandings of the world and bodily ones. Text and body, Marvin and Ingle claim, are antithetical poles in a centuries-old discourse, and symbols—within that discourse—of a clash between social classes. Textual classes owe their power to the exercise of skills associated with education and with literacy, bodily classes are those whose power relies on “whatever value their bodies have for cultural muscle-work.”<sup>15</sup> Through the elimination of forms of communication in which the role of the body is made explicit—such as the celebration, the festival, the ritual—and their replacement with more textualized forms, social power is also rearranged. “Written language conceals and denies the body in order to exercise control over it, or more accurately, to give bodies that control texts power over bodies that do not.”<sup>16</sup> A nineteenth century Philadelphia voter on Election Day was engaged in a social ritual that, while delivering a message of democratic empowerment and equality, also delivered messages of community solidarity, of social hierarchy, and social exclusion. The same is true of a voter in that city, one hundred years later. To paraphrase a claim made by Feyerabend, the difference between the two is that the one realized what he was doing, and the other does not.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, we are able to answer the two questions with which I began the dissertation: the question about how and why the Election Day celebration disappeared, and the question about what message Election Day communicates to the public. As to the first question, the answer would be as follows: the disappearance of Election Day was the product both of changes in law and changes in communication

media that directly or indirectly attacked both the means and the opportunity for Election Day crowds to gather in Philadelphia's city streets and celebrate their existence as a public. However, those changes were made in the context of a more general re-construction of the meaning of the vote, of the citizen, and of democratic politics generally. This change in the understanding of politics was reflected in the evolving practices of Election Day—so that ceremony and spectacle gradually disappeared from the event—and also in the altered public that was now performed on that day. It was a public defined largely through reference to a set of skills that only part of the eligible voting population would be expected to exercise with any sort of confidence.

The significance of this change lays both in the manner by which Election Day contributes to defining the boundaries of the modern voting public, and in the role it has played in the public discourse of the city of Philadelphia. That performance has often been the occasion for Philadelphians to wrestle with important questions, not simply about the policies of government, but about what democratic politics means and who it ought to include. The Election Day celebrations were often not comfortable or admirable portrayals of the public. That is not simply a judgment delivered from the heights of the present on to the past: it was the opinion of many Philadelphians themselves at the time. Election Day communicated certain truths about the public of Philadelphia to itself that could not be communicated, or could be communicated only imperfectly, through other means. In defining the democratic public through a



particularly vivid and dramatic style, it also communicated the identity, the vitality, and the potential power of that public.

It was not a revolutionary public, to be sure, and if that is the standard by which we are to measure all democratic communication then Election Day, but not only Election Day, will fall short. There is a sense in which any ritual, Election Day included, carries within its very structure a conservative political emphasis. Maurice Bloch has noted how the restricted speech codes of political performances serve as an elite method for controlling what all the participants can say, which is similar to the argument critics make of the democratic ballot.<sup>18</sup> This means, among other things, that ritual simplifies the world. Election Day forces citizens to make clear cut, black and white decisions about matters that involve a great deal of gray. The ballot does not allow for subtlety. It does not allow the voter to support this candidate's policies on the environment, and that one's on the economy. It presents instead a very stark, all or nothing, choice. Moreover, as a ritual, it celebrates a vision of the public that is a great deal more hierarchical than official democratic ideology is comfortable with; it divides citizens into those who are competent to judge, and those who are not.

For these reasons and others, it is easy to point out the way in which this celebration does not live up to the ideological claims often made for it. But that is perhaps part of the point. It is *so very easy* to criticize the Election Day message, because it makes the fault lines of politics so manifest, because it draws them so clearly. In doing so, it provokes discussion about issues that might not otherwise be addressed. This widespread publicity is not so clearly present in other forms of

democratic communication. Conversations—whether they happen in a coffee shop, or in a Paris salon, or at an academic conference—also embody assumptions about power and social exclusivity.<sup>19</sup> So does the front page of the *New York Times*. In these cases, however, the lines of power are less easy to see, being somewhat more refined than a Jacksonian Election Day riot between Irish Democratic and Nativist Whig voters in Moyamensing, or the confusion of the 2000 Election. The key here, obviously, is the question of publicity. To the extent that Election Day serves not only to establish political power but also to provoke questions about power, then it must be seen. It must be publicly celebrated. To the extent that its performance is carried out in private space, to that extent the political system is safe from reflections about its workings that the performance of Election Day might raise.

### Conclusion:

The aim of this dissertation has not been to uncover the evolution of Philadelphia's Election Day, and the disappearance of many of its more emphatically public practices, in order to make an argument for specific policies or changes that might improve the health of the American public, or of electoral democracy. That is not because I consider these unimportant issues. I consider them extremely important. Simply changing the practices by which a public conducts itself on the day of the vote, however, is unlikely to do much to alter the modern public landscape. The question of how Election Day and the act of voting are currently configured in modern American discourse, both popular and academic, is of a piece with how we think about politics

generally, and I began this project with the belief that much of the current discussion about politics and political communication has been misdirected. The argument that I have tried to make in this dissertation about what Election Day meant for the public of Philadelphia, and how and why it changed, and the implications of that change, are efforts at provoking a different set of questions about the public and political discourse than the ones most scholars now ask.

First of all, my method of approaching the message of Election Day is one that attempted to keep in mind at all times a focus on the democratic body as it performed on Election Day: what that body was doing, where it was doing it, whom it was doing it with. To the extent that I have been interested in the effects of the mass media, this has not been in relation to its role as political propaganda or as persuasion, but rather its role in creating and changing social spaces, and the relation of bodies to other bodies in these spaces. I have also been interested in the media's role as a ritual device for drawing boundaries both within a modern public—that is, between the parties—and for drawing a line around that public. These sorts of questions are important for two reasons: first, as Marvin suggests, because the failure to acknowledge them has important implications for social power and social inequality. It behooves academics, particularly, as the preeminent textual class in a modern democracy, to consider their relationship to bodies and to texts in a critical light.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as Michael Schudson has argued, the physical experience of voting, or any other form of political communication, is often the most vivid and memorable method of instructing us in the

democratic life. It may teach us important lessons that are missed in textbooks or university classes.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, what I have tried to do here is to challenge a rarely questioned assumption in much of the academic discourse about the role of political ritual, political spectacle, and political ceremony, as this relates to democratic forms of communication. Too often, the use of such terms has been linked to the notion of artifice, thus to illusion and deception, and thus in turn to some argument about elite manipulation of the masses through the use of spectacle and political theater. But the notion of artifice need not—and traditionally did not—imply falsity. It was simply a piece of the constructed world, that portion of the world held in common; the public world.<sup>22</sup> Thus all politics has an aesthetic sense, all politics has ritual, and that includes politics in a modern American city like Philadelphia. This political style, in turn, will have implications for political power within the community. The Election Day performances of an earlier age in Philadelphia's history may have been a sort of manufactured political theater, and yet still have delivered an important, even democratic, political message through that performance. I have argued here that it did deliver such a message, which had real effects on the image that the public had of itself, not all of them to the liking of that public's supposed political masters.

Like the argument about the role of bodies in the democratic life, this claim is also related to a larger argument, in this case, Richard Sennett's narrative about the fall of public man. Sennett sees in the progression of modern civic life—in the day-to-day rituals and roles played out on city streets and in public buildings—the gradual

replacement of the self-conscious use of convention and public masks with a style of public life that emphasizes authenticity and intimacy. Such a change, he argues, signals a loss not only for our public lives but also our private lives, since we are led to place demands upon our inner worlds that they cannot bear.<sup>23</sup> A similar kind of narrative could be written about the evolution of Philadelphia's Election Day. The event has seen the gradual movement away from public spaces, like the Election grounds in front of the State House, or the parades on Broad Street, into private spaces and private homes. It has seen the slow but continual erosion of many public conventions. In so doing, Election Day gradually loses the ability to communicate to participants their place in the political world, and their links to their fellow citizens. The physical public enacted on Election Day becomes more and more constricted, the ties that bind voters one to another, in a public, become more and more difficult to see.

Finally, I have tried, through the treatment of Election Day as ritual, to frame the act of voting as something more than simply a utilitarian tool aimed at either the protection of freedoms or the advancement of the public or private good. Along these lines, I have argued that Election Day's importance as a democratic message lies, in part, in its ability to deliver a message both of universality and exclusion, freedom and restraint, equality and hierarchy, pluralism and social cohesion. It is an argument about the ritual's ability to contain the paradoxes and contradictions of modern democratic life within a single set of practices.

Ignoring the way that Election Day, as a public event, has in the past and continues to be a battleground where questions of social identity and the nature of

democratic life are fought over, allows scholars and citizens generally to use electoral institutions, and forms of mainstream political communication, as convenient whipping boys. Electoral politics becomes inherently suspect—a political spectacle—whereas other forms of communication become inherently democratic, as in Berger’s argument about the revolutionary public demonstration, or Nancy Fraser’s opposition between the inegalitarian, stifling bourgeois public sphere, and the libratory communicative practices that inhere, at least in theory, to subaltern publics.<sup>24</sup> What such oppositions fail to come to terms with is the possibility that *all* political rituals may share certain qualities as a form of communication, whether they are undertaken by groups one approves of or those one does not.

Election Day, due in part to its formal importance in a representative democratic system, is a particularly notable instance of political ritual and human artifice. Hence its inability to measure up to the current ideals of public communication is particularly egregious. The result is that as a public event it produces not a message of power but a message of cynicism. Writers of a post-modern or critical persuasion argue that the disillusionment modern publics often demonstrate toward electoral politics and the meaning of the vote—either through public opinion polls or their lack of participation—is the inevitable result of the increased “reflexivity” of the modern world, the ability to see through the con of liberal politics and democratic institutions.<sup>25</sup> This flatters modern democracy with an insight it does not deserve. Our cynicism about what a vote does, and what democratic politics means, is not evidence of a hard-earned political sophistication unavailable to earlier

generations, but of mistaken assumptions about the forms of communication necessary to any polity, democratic or otherwise. The results of this cynicism are not as libtatory as these critics might suppose. A democratic vote is the moment when political power is legitimated, the moment when the democratic public identifies itself with that power. Cynicism about the vote's role as communication does not send a cynical message about the state merely, as though that state were easily distinguishable from the public in whose name it acts. It throws in doubt that public's ability to operate politically. A public that has no ability to effect political change through this central act of political will does not simply end up distrusting the government, but itself.

The easy dismissal of the election as mere ritual, or as political spectacle, also forecloses a more critical examination of many aspects of the message that the modern Election Day now sends about the modern public; the way in which it draws boundaries around that public, for example. The changing style and manner of the twentieth century Election Day, the change in the social construction of the meaning of a vote and an election, were perhaps advances in some sense for democratic participation. But they were not universally so. A great deal of the rhetoric and practice surrounding the modern Election Day serves, either consciously or unconsciously, to exclude from that performance certain parts of the population. This is not a problem for many members of the voting public, who do not want uneducated, or political unsophisticated, or disinterested citizens at the polls. But for the members of those disconnected populations, which have so few other forms of social and economic power at their disposal, it is perhaps rather more of a problem.

There is no good reason, given what we can see of the manner in which rituals work generally, and in the history of this ritual in particular, to suppose that Election Day will ever be as inclusive an event as many democrats would no doubt like it to be. There is no reason to suppose that it will ever be as pluralistic a ritual, as egalitarian, as official ideology would have it. But this does not excuse us from trying to make it more inclusive, more egalitarian, than it now is. In an unequal world, a ritual such as Election Day, which celebrates the equality of participants, will by its very nature be problematic. For that reason, the critique of the democratic election, the reflections on it and on the questions it raises, the continual attempt to improve it or to change it, are central to the modern democratic life. But to dismiss what happens on Election Day as a ritual, to dismiss it because *it is a ritual*, is to dismiss the fundamental method by which a democratic public constructs itself as a political body that is capable not simply of expressing wishes or complaints but of exerting power on its world. If critics of the democratic vote really believe that it is unsalvageable as a form of communication, then they have the obligation, at the very least, to propose a realistic alternative to the ritual message that it has delivered to the public, and still does.

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the religious life* (New York: Free Press, 1915) pp. 414, 420-28.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, *The public and its problems* (Denver, CO: A. Swallow, 1954) p. 142, 182-84, 213-18.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the authors cited in the second chapter of this work—MacAloon, Handelman, Marvin and Ingle, Dayan and Katz, De Matta—I would mention as well Susan Davis, *Parades and power: street theater in nineteenth century Philadelphia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1988); and two collections of works: Lynn Hunt, *The new cultural history* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), (especially the essays by Hunt, Suzanne Desan, and Mary Ryan); and Sean Wilentz, ed. *Rites of power: symbolism, ritual, and politics since the middle ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> John Berger, "The nature of mass demonstrations," in *The look of things* (New York: Viking, 1972) p. 247. See also the discussion of "congregational crowds" in Simonson and Marvin, "Voting alone," pp. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, *ibid.*, p. 247.



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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Benjamin Ginsburg, *The captive public: how mass opinion promotes state power* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Ronald Hirschbein, *Voting rites: the devolution of American democracy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Carl Watner and Wendy McElroy, eds. *Dissenting electorate: those who refuse to vote and the legitimacy of their opposition* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Steven Lukes, "Political ritual and social integration," *Sociology* 9(2) 1975, p. 304.

<sup>8</sup> Murray Edelman, *Constructing the political spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> George Kateb, *Inner ocean: individualism and democratic culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 36 ff

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> This argument about the tensions within liberal democracy, and of the paradoxes embodied by the vote, was suggested by my reading of Chantal Mouffe, *The democratic paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> David Boldt, "Leave voting to the people in the know," *Inquirer*, Nov. 7, 2000, p. A15.

<sup>13</sup> See Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1996), Appendix B, Tables B1.1, B3.1, B4.1, B5.1, and B10.1.

<sup>14</sup> Marvin, "The body of the text: literacy's corporeal constraint," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 80(2) 1994, pp. 130,131.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin and Ingle, *Blood sacrifice and the nation*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *One hundred twentieth-century philosophers*, eds. Stuart Brown, Diane Collison, and Robert Wilkinson (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> Bloch, "Introduction," to *Political language and oratory in traditional society* (London: Academic Press, 1975) pp. 5-11; See also Bell, *Ritual*, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Schudson, "Why conversation is not the soul of democracy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14(4) 1997, pp. 298-99.

<sup>20</sup> Marvin, "Bodies, texts, and the social order: a reply to Bielefeldt," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81(1) 1995, pp. 103-107.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Schudson, *Good Citizens and bad history: today's political ideals in historical perspective* (Murfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *The human condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957) pp. 175-247, pp. 50-58; see also Dana Villa, *Politics, philosophy, terror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) pp. 107-154.

<sup>23</sup> Sennett, *Fall of public man*, pp. 4-12, 337-340.

<sup>24</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy," in *Habermas and the public sphere*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) p. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Neal Gabler, "The Election: the unveiling—beind the political curtain," *The New York Times*, Dec. 10, 2000, section 4, page 1; Ron Hirschbein, *Voting rites: the devolution of American politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999) pp. 42-47, 130- 134.

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