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**Small Screen, Big Impact: A Historical Examination of the Effects of
Television on the 1988 Federal Election Campaign**

by

William Peter Stos, B.J. (Com. Hons).

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

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Abstract

For seven weeks in 1988 Canada witnessed one of the most volatile federal election campaigns in its history. Long considered to be a “free trade” election in the tradition of 1891 and 1911, the 1988 election is analyzed in this thesis with an eye for a more subtle political dynamic. Using theories and concepts borrowed from the field of mass communications – namely: agenda-setting, framing and priming – this study examines the manner in which political strategists and the news media created and/or facilitated their own preferred campaign narratives. In this way, these elites strove to suggest an agenda by which the electorate would be conditioned to frame its decision when casting a ballot, thereby powerfully influencing the nature and direction of the democratic dialogue. This goal was accomplished chiefly by utilizing the television medium and this thesis argues this campaign could be considered, to quote political scientist John Meisel, the first “boob-tube” election in Canada. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of archived television footage broadcast at the time, including newscasts, political party advertising and the leaders’ debate, was reinforced by oral interviews with people involved in setting the 1988 agenda. This thesis then applied mass communication concepts to a historical narrative in hopes of creating a hybrid political history, one that combines the historian’s perspective and the journalist’s and political scientist’s intensive presentism.

Acknowledgements

Although this thesis is the culmination of months of research and writing often conducted in solitude, it would not have been possible for me to complete it without the help of many family members, friends, colleagues and ready access to a myriad of sources.

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"Photo Opportunity."
Performed by John Gray
on The Journal, November 11, 1988.

At last we have the answers to dilemmas old and new.
Delivered with a smile from ear to ear.
Invite the press for lunch in an appropriate milieu.
The camera makes the issue disappear.

Is acid rain the worry of the moment?
Wear a lab coat and pose beside this tree.
Form an expression of botanical regret.
That's a photo opportunity.

Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a chore.
Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a bore.

All the world's a stage, some are stagier than most.
But we all act our parts as best we can.
Are we really looking for a leader or a host?
When does the act become the man?

Put on a hard hat, you become the worker's friend.
Kiss a baby and you'd never harm a flea.
If the lightning isn't perfect, you can do it once again.
That's a photo opportunity.

Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a chore.
Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a bore.

Wrap your body in the flag, then grin until you gag.
Assert your Prairie roots with your dirty rubber boots.
Wear an old Sou'wester hat, Blue Nosers go for that.
Give them all a photo opportunity.

Oh wouldn't it be lovely if life were just like that?
Take your picture in a mansion if you're poor.
If you're lonely for Alberta, just put on a Stetson hat.
The photo op's a universal cure.

Send photographs of burgers to the hungry.
To end war, photograph your enemy.
Unite the country from Inuvik to the Fundy.
It's all a photo opportunity.

Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a chore.
Photo opportunity, thank heaven for photography.
Photo opportunity, when words are such a bore.
When words are such a chore, that's what the lens is for.

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Introduction: Setting The Scene

“You could call it the boob-tube election,” John Meisel suggested to a newspaper reporter covering federal political developments in the midst of the 1988 federal election campaign.¹ A Queen's University political scientist and, ironically, the former head of the federal broadcast regulatory apparatus, Meisel made the statement in reference to the continuing influence of television coverage on the minds of voters. His colloquial terminology and its startling assessment of one particular federal election obliges us to revisit the topsy-turvy world of the 1988 election and to refresh our sense of what made it so distinct from virtually every domestic political contest that preceded it.

“Welcome To The Eighties”: The Changing Political Climate

As Robert Mason Lee states in his engaging book on the 1988 election, One Hundred Monkeys, Canada in the 1980s was a post-literate society.² The influence of newspapers and other periodicals was on the wane and, more than ever before, the country was tuned in and turned on to network television. Since its creation and early development in the 1940s and 1950s, the reach of the small screen had grown impressively. According to Statistics Canada's Market Research Handbook, 1990, 8,793,000 households, or 95.1 per cent of all inhabited dwellings had at least one colour television, and 69 per cent of households with television also subscribed to a cable package.³ Although many Canadians continued to read and enjoy newspapers and magazines, they increasingly sought out television broadcasts for their national news and

¹ Murray Campbell. “TV generation zapping the election process.” *The Globe and Mail*, 7 November, 1988, p. A1.

² Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*. (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 17 and p. 138.

³ *Market Research Handbook*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990), Tables 6-12 and 6-14, p. 238 and p. 240.

entertainment needs.⁴ By the 1980s, the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement's (BBM) annual tabulation and analysis of audience viewing habits reveal the degree to which Canadians were wedded to their nightly news with such notable anchors as Knowlton Nash and Peter Mansbridge of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and Harvey Kirck and Lloyd Robertson of the Canadian Television Network (CTV). For instance, Statistics Canada's *Culture Statistics: Television Viewing in Canada 1986-1988*, which used BBM numbers in its analysis, reveals that "news and public affairs shows were the most popular domestic programming, making up almost 50 per cent of the total viewing of Canadian shows."⁵ Even when foreign programming is added to the equation, domestic news and public affairs shows accounted for 18.7 per cent of programs watched in the country, in 1988, and second only to foreign dramas at 25.7 per cent.⁶

Perhaps reflecting the decline in influence of ideological editorial content in newspapers and the rise of middle-of-the-road broadcast news coverage, Canadians also seemed to shedding their partisan loyalties as they entered a wired community.⁷

Politically, Canadians were gravitating towards personalities and dropping long-standing

⁴ The baby boom generation's childhood memories were punctuated with the discovery and commercialization of television.

⁵ *Culture Statistics: Television Viewing in Canada 1986-1988*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, 1990,) p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa : Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 103. In Lawrence LeDuc's chapter on "The Changeable Canadian Voter," a table on "Voting Change in Federal Elections: 1974-1984," which uses information from the Canadian National Election Studies of 1974, 1979 and 1984, shows a measurable decrease in the number of voters who cast a ballot for the same party from one election to the next. By 1984, only 52 per cent of the electorate voted for the same party as in the previous election, and 23 per cent voted for a different party. This compares to 60 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively in 1974 and 55 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively in 1979. (The remaining percentage consisted of voters who re-entered or left the electorate, or who were new entrants), p. 110. Moreover, LeDuc writes that "while most Canadians express some degree of allegiance toward a political party, relatively few are strongly partisan. In the 1984 National Election Study, only 23 per cent were found to be 'very strong' supporters of any political party," p. 105. Moreover, J. Murray Beck notes that the phenomenon likely started even earlier: "In recent years the intensity of party identification has declined even in the traditionalist provinces," he writes, also noting the growing volatility of the Canadian electorate. J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections*, (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-

loyalties to political parties that often went back generations. This new reality was evident in volatile popular opinion polls. When participants were asked which party they would support in an election, for example, all three major parties topped voters' preferences at some point in the year leading up to the 1988 election in Gallup polls.⁸ Minority governments had become a fixture of Canadian politics. The polls also found a growing segment of undecided voters. A review of polls which inquired about voting intentions during the 1988 election campaign reveals between 8 to 28 per cent of voters were undecided at points during the lead-up to the vote,⁹ although, in fairness some of this variance comes from the way answers were tabulated.¹⁰

This new political reality and media climate would ultimately shape the manner in which election campaigns were run by party workers and covered by the country's reporters. While campaign strategy would evolve over the course of several elections during the electronic age, the 1988 federal election would somewhat paradoxically become both a watershed moment in the development of televised campaigning and the high watermark for network television news broadcasts' influence on Canadian political contests. It is as if for one magic moment – an election fought over the historically divisive issue of free trade – network television captured and manipulated all political attention and then lost its monopoly as other electronic media such as the burgeoning cable channels, email, and the Internet began to transmit the message in a myriad of novel ways. A major factor in the primacy of this particular election in the post-literate era was its unusual status as a veritable single-issue campaign. Although politicians, the

Hall, 1968) Pendulum of Power: Canadian Federal Elections, p 431.

⁸ Frizzell and others, p. 92.

⁹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

media and voters discussed many other issues in 1988, including the state of the environment, the country's fiscal outlook, the abortion question, immigration levels, national unity and constitutional reform, the campaign to form a government in the 34th Parliament was very much shaped by the free trade debate – so much so, that it would transcend the normal machinations of an election to become *the* central and defining element. As J. Murray Beck attests in his 1968 Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections, a concise, yet instructive review of the country's first century of federal campaigns, the Canadian electorate's abiding passion for governing from the political centre has conspired to make "single issue" elections rare in Canada. Sharp issues oblige voters to make extreme decisions that seldom build consensus in the centre. Polarity in Canada has tended to erode stability rather than build it – 1917's conscription election providing the best illustration. From the outset, therefore, the 1988 campaign appeared to run against the grain of Canadian political interests. In fact, Canadians had twice before – in 1891 and 1911 – been asked to consider reciprocity with the United States of America, and for the party advocating the deal in 1988, the results could not be seen as encouraging.

A Short History Of Free Trade In Previous Elections

The Liberals, under Wilfrid Laurier, championed the issue in both the 1891 and 1911 election campaigns and suffered bitter defeats each time to the Conservatives, first under Sir John A. Macdonald and subsequently under Robert Borden. In Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections, Beck states that most voters have made up their minds about for whom they will vote before the campaign begins and in less than one-

third of these contests do campaigns change the election's eventual result.¹¹ He contends "the crucial factor in deciding most elections has been the capacity of a party to preserve an attractive image in the eyes of the voter in the period between elections."¹²

Nevertheless, Beck also suggests the two previous free trade campaigns were somewhat different in this respect, and it behooves a student of elections to determine why these campaigns proved to be an exception to his rule.

1891: The Old Flag, The Old Policy, The Old Leader

Drawing upon the work of other notable scholars such as O.D. Skelton, who described the 1891 election as the "most bitterly contested since Confederation,"¹³ and Sir John Thompson's biographer Castell Hopkins, who characterized it as a contest of "the principles of British unity, British commerce, and British sympathy ... against Continental unity, Continental trade, and Continental sympathy,"¹⁴ Beck establishes the problems each major party faced as they approached the campaign.

Macdonald's government faced political scandals in Quebec, painful divisions in his caucus over language issues,¹⁵ and a nation locked in recession. Laurier faced similar issues and hoped to pave over racial and linguistic differences, so he could unite his caucus behind a cause.¹⁶ The opposition leader found his campaign's purpose in a proposed reciprocity agreement with the United States. Macdonald, who was "certain that unrestricted reciprocity had political implications which threatened the country's independent status,"¹⁷ opted to fight the proposal. Framing the debate along patriotic

¹¹ Beck, p. preface.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Louis Riel's memory hovered over the Tory.

¹⁶ Beck, p. 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

lines, his question for voters was stark: “Shall we endanger our possession of the great heritage bequeathed to us by our fathers, and submit ourselves to direct taxation for the privilege of having our tariff fixed at Washington, with the prospect of ultimately becoming a portion of the American union?”¹⁸ Macdonald’s own political acumen told him that a decisive promise in dismal times could turn the electorate’s inclination to stay with the status quo. His National Policy of 1878 had done just this and left the free-trading Grits out of office. As Beck explains, “the stage was set for the loyalty campaign of 1891.”¹⁹

While never doubting Macdonald’s sincere opposition to a proposal that he believed would put Canada’s sovereignty in jeopardy, Beck is careful to note the prime minister’s ingenious and calculated use of loyalist rhetoric to reinforce his characterization of the debate. Reciprocity was not a mere commercial agreement, but an issue that struck at the very heart of the Canadian identity. Macdonald lodged accusations of “veiled treason” at his opponents and proudly stated: “A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die.”²⁰ Campaigning under the slogan, “The Old Flag, The Old Policy, The Old Leader,” the prime minister cultivated and exploited nationalist sentiment and loyalty to Great Britain, while also exploiting fears of potential annexation with America.²¹ In effect, Macdonald played his most reliable Tory trump card.

Laurier’s ability to fend off this challenge was arguably hindered by the communications network of the time.²² As J.S. Willison wrote in Laurier and the Liberal Party II, “the shouts of treason grew louder, the appeal to passion and prejudice more

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p. 68.

vehement, the charges of plotting and conspiracy more shrill and insistent.”²³ Although Macdonald’s Conservatives entered the race suffering from the problems associated with a long, unchallenged term in office, a weak economy and internal party bickering, strong organization on the ground, supportive newspaper editorialists and an emotional appeal to voters’ national pride carried the day.²⁴

1911: The Second Time Around And Down

Laurier enjoyed a successful tenure as prime minister from 1896 to 1911 until he floated the idea of a reciprocity agreement with the United States once again. If Canadians rejected free trade in the economically depressed 1890s, might they now embrace it in the comfortable times of the first two decades of the twentieth century? Lingering anxieties about the impact of greater economic integration with America were nonetheless adeptly exploited by the Conservatives. Beck is explicit in his belief that the Liberal prime minister would have very likely won a fifth consecutive mandate were it not for the referendum-like 1911 election being decided on reciprocity and, to a lesser extent, the naval question in Quebec.²⁵ Although the negotiated deal with the United States, which lowered tariff walls on certain raw materials, looked like a suitable arrangement to the government and initially to most Canadians whose economy increasingly depended on the American market, there remained underlying concerns that reciprocity would stall efforts to establish branch plants in Canada, run counter to the lauded East-West transportation system, and inhibit planned reciprocity within the British

²² This was an era of partisan journalism. Please see John H. Wadland and Margaret Hobbs, *The Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. II*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Plate 51.

²³ Beck, p. 64.

²⁴ Although it should be noted that Macdonald only just managed to avoid defeat in 1891 by playing to the worries of highly populated central Canada.

²⁵ Beck, p. 120.

Empire.²⁶

Beck argues “there were other aspects of the reciprocity argument that permitted the Canadian voter to be subjected to a sentimentality which makes that of 1891 look anemic.”²⁷ He quotes a correspondent for the *Round Table* who noted at the time that the “‘exuberant rhetoric, inflated invective and hectic appeals to sentiment and prejudice’ of 1911 were not the ordinary manifestations of ‘that very human performance’ which constitutes a general election.”²⁸ A further obstacle for the Liberals came by way of U.S. President Taft’s unfortunate musings about the eventual decline of his northern neighbour and his hopes for a North American continent under the Stars and Stripes.²⁹ Beck explains to readers that

the foes of reciprocity also attempted to demonstrate that, if something is dinned often enough into a listener, he will come to believe it. They conjured up the evils of ‘continentalism,’ ‘annexation,’ and ‘fusion’ *ad nauseum*; they talked so much about Canadians ‘selling their birthright for a mess of pottage’ or becoming ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ that the Liberals failed to make the case for reciprocity.³⁰

Although some academics have attempted to credit the Conservatives’ victory with strong organization on the ground,³¹ Beck’s reading and reporting of primary and secondary sources indicates their successful framing of the issue as one of loyalty to Canada and Britain as opposed to a commercial deal were once again the most consequential in affecting the outcome. “The reciprocity arrangement became a rallying point for Canadian nationalists and the opposition defeated Laurier under the slogan, ‘No

²⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 125.

³¹ Ibid.

truck or trade with the Yankees.’”³²

In each of the two previous elections fought largely on the issue of free trade, the campaign, and not pre-existing partisan organization and loyalties, proved to be the crucial and deciding factor in the outcome. Victory went to the party which could best spin the issue; Laurier chose an economic spin and Borden put a loyalty spin on the issue. The Conservatives, who on the whole opposed reciprocity, framed the debate as one in which Canadians would decide whether they valued possible economic gain more than patriotism and loyalty. Newspapermen and pamphleteers who had some partisan attachment to the Conservatives assisted in disseminating this message to voters, and, as Beck notes, their opponents found that once the ballot-box question had been set, there was hardly any way to challenge it. “It is difficult to allay charges of disloyalty by mere words,”³³ he correctly states. For the next half century, the danger of a one issue election was genetically stamped into our national political code and no political leader understood this better than William Lyon Mackenzie King. If a political party tried to sell Canadians on the idea of free trade again, there would need to be a fundamental change in the manner election campaigns were fought – one that could quickly neutralize or counter an attack on patriotic lines. Only a revolutionary technological advance that transcended the written word and local stump speech could hope to successfully counter the emotional rhetoric of free trade opponents.

1948: The Aborted Attempt

Canada’s most successful prime minister (at least in terms of political longevity), William Lyon Mackenzie King, had the perils of sailing too close to the shores of free

³² *Maple Leaf Web*, (Lethbridge, Alberta: University of Lethbridge), accessed 25 July, 2006, available from <http://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/economy/us-canada/trading-partners.html>, Internet.

trade instilled in him as a neophyte serving with Laurier in 1911. Nonetheless, seduced by post-WWII prosperity, he had secretly empowered two of his senior ministers to negotiate a comprehensive free trade agreement with U.S. government representatives in 1947. But, haunted by the memory of Laurier's 1911 folly, he abruptly abandoned his plans for fear that history would repeat itself for a third time.³⁴ The necessary technological advances and audience penetration of the electronic mass media had yet to overcome the lingering power of the printed word. Although the fast pace, time-constrained focus and personality-orientated aspects of a mercurial electronic campaign would come to revolutionize campaigns, the predominance of print reporters following the contest allowed them to dictate the ebb and the flow of the campaign in their traditional and staid style. More essentially, though radio broadcasts and filmed events were fast becoming an important part of the world's communication networks, politicians themselves were still learning to master their potential and exploit their reach. The 1953 election would feature Canada's first televised campaign and by and large the politicians in that contest were awkward in the camera's lens – Louis St. Laurent was stiff looking and George Drew was authoritarian.

Third Time's A Charm: Development Of Next Free Trade Debate

Unlike King, who was approaching a carefully-orchestrated retirement, in 1988 Brian Mulroney faced the sobering prospect of having early retirement thrust upon him as voters grew restless with the direction of his government. In 1984, Mulroney had led his party to one of the most decisive victories in the country's history. The Progressive

³³ Beck, p. 64.

³⁴ J.D.M. Stewart, "The Legacy of William Lyon Mackenzie King In Canada," *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 November, 2004, available from the *History News Network*, <http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/8631.html>, Internet.

Conservatives soundly trounced Prime Minister John Turner's Liberals, winning just over 50 per cent of the popular vote and 211 of 282 seats in the House of Commons to the Liberals' 40. The New Democrats, under long-time leader Ed Broadbent, found themselves nipping at the heels of Canada's "natural governing party" with their 30 seats in the Commons and the second largest share of the popular vote in English Canada.³⁵ Prime Minister Mulroney's electoral honeymoon with the country's voters would be relatively short-lived, however, and his first years in office brought with them a rollercoaster of fortune. Regional tensions in the government's coalition, conflict-of-interest scandals and voter disgust with patronage appointments precipitated a decline in popular support for the Tories by the mid-point of their mandate.³⁶

A New Mandate For A New Direction

Sensing a need to distinguish his party from his competition, Mulroney and his strategists sought out a wedge-issue to solidify the Progressive Conservative base and to appeal to uncommitted voters. As Duffy writes in *Fights of Our Lives*, "To retain the power he treasured, the prime minister had to give Canadians in every part of the country a reason to support him. He needed a vision, and the search for one was to lead him back to a nation-building issue that had lain dormant for three-quarters of a century."³⁷ That issue – free trade, a veritable minefield in Canadian political history – would come to define the 1988 campaign in the minds of the electorate, journalists and historians.

Interestingly, Mulroney and his Progressive Conservatives had initially positioned themselves on the wrong side of an issue that would be central to their 1988 campaign.

³⁵ John Duffy, *Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership and the Making of Canada*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 308.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

During his 1983 leadership bid, Mulroney told his supporters and the media that free trade was not an idea he intended to pursue.³⁸ He stuck with the proven Tory “no truck or trade” mantra. However, there were indications that prominent opinion makers were in the process of reevaluating the supposed menace of free trade. A Royal Commission on the “economic vision,” pockets of mandarin support in Ottawa and strong advocacy in several provincial capitals suggested free trade might have finally come of age.³⁹

Mulroney sensed that free trade could become a policy that would substantially differentiate his Tories from the increasingly economic nationalist Liberals and the pro-labour and protectionist NDP. “Mulroney also understood that pushing free trade squarely addressed the all-important question of leadership; by showing guts and foresight in proposing free trade, he could also drive up his personal ratings,”⁴⁰ postulates Duffy.

³⁸ Graham Fraser. *Playing For Keeps: The Making Of The Prime Minister, 1988*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), p. 40.

³⁹ *Canada Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada Report. Vol. I*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1985). N.B. The commission chair was the Hon. Donald MacDonald. In this commission report, the authors survey the economic landscape of the early 1980s quoted a column by journalist Anthony Westell which asked “what went wrong with the third option?” In it, Westell lamented the failure of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s economic vision for the country – one which purposefully resisted American pressures. As a result, Westell argues that Canada has drifted back to the first option: the status quo. He suggests the country’s second option – closer integration with the United States – is still promising and should be examined, p. 299. The committee accepted the challenge, and stated that its “purpose is to formulate broad negotiating objectives and procedural frameworks to give direction and focus to bilateral talks,” p. 302. The report indicates the commission’s biggest concerns were to obtain barrier-free access for Canadian producers, maintain the GATT negotiations, and protect sovereignty, p. 302-303. The authors clearly favour a free trade agreement of some kind. For example, three pages of the report are dedicated to addressing problem areas, p. 331-334, while eight pages are used to annotate its potential costs and benefits, p. 323-331. Interestingly, from the perspective of this thesis, the committee foresaw some of the arguments that would be made in the 1988 campaign. For example, during the 1988 television leadership debates, Liberal leader John Turner accused Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of selling out the country for the 20 per cent of trade that was not already free. In the report, the authors argued that the “rosy forecast of 80 per cent free trade... masks the fact that trade takes place through ‘holes’ in the tariff [and] while a tariff of 5 to ten per cent may not prevent trade, it will deter investment beyond that necessary to service the Canadian market,” p. 374. Furthermore, in the report’s conclusion, the commission illuminates the way a future debate may be framed. “Canadian trade policy has been, and will continue to be, developed as a trade-off between the business objective of securing improved access to foreign markets, the economic need to promote efficiency and competitiveness in the domestic economy, and the political need to maintain our sovereignty and freedom of action,” p. 379.

Assessing The Competition

The prime minister was not the only leader to face poor reviews during his first mandate. Following Turner's disastrous performance in 1984, he found it difficult to shake the notion that he was "yesterday's man" and more of a sheet anchor to his party's drifting fortunes than a battle-ready captain. Furthermore, Turner had left politics in the mid-1970s before House of Commons debates were televised.⁴¹ He was unprepared for the growing importance of broadcast journalism and seemingly unaware of the decline in cordiality among politicians and reporters covering Parliament Hill. He was locked into the personality of chummy, old boys' politics and somehow missed the participatory quality that Trudeau had introduced to the Canadian political fabric. Moreover, as a lawyer with close ties to the nation's business elite, at first glance Turner made an unlikely opponent to the proposed agreement. Indeed, NDP leader Ed Broadbent would find political capital by reminding voters that he was the best candidate to rally against Mulroney's Wall Street and Turner's Bay Street in favour of "Main Street Canada."⁴² It is important to remember that Turner repeatedly tried to explain to Canadians that he was not against the idea of free trade *per se*, but rather the particular deal the Progressive Conservatives had negotiated.

⁴⁰ Duffy, p. 316.

⁴¹ James R. Robertson. *Television and the House of Commons*, (Ottawa: Law and Government Division, 1990). Updated December, 1998. Accessed from <http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp242-e.htm>. Robertson notes "broadcasting of the proceedings of the Canadian House of Commons began in the autumn of 1977 after years of study and debate." According to the Canadian Parliament's official website for John Napier Turner, the MP resigned his seat on February 12, 1976 and returned to the House of Commons on November 5, 1984. *Federal Experience: John Napier Turner*, (Ottawa: Parliament of Canada). Accessed from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/key/bio.asp?Language=E&query=1776&s=M>, Internet.

⁴² *The National*, (Toronto: 8 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The. For example, Broadbent says "In Ontario and Quebec or elsewhere in Atlantic Canada are going to be saying no to Brian Mulroney's Wall Street vision for a future of Canada, they're going to be saying no to John Turner's alternative of a Bay Street view of Canada, and they're going to be saying yes to Main Street Canada and to

Nonetheless, there were concerns among party strategists that this nuanced approach might see the Liberals squeezed out of the debate, particularly if Canadians came to view free trade as an all-or-nothing proposition. With the Tories coming out solidly behind the deal and the New Democrats vehemently opposed on ideological grounds, the Liberals might find themselves in the no-man's land in the midst of a polarized debate. And, given the fast-paced, low content nature of televised political reporting, would most Canadians stay tuned long enough to note the difference? As Duffy explains,

Turner understood that his was a lawyer's argument, too complex for the mass of undecided voters and too limited to generate emotion among them. He realized that, before the election, he needed to pare down the legalities and pump up the emotion: less on the weak dispute settlement mechanism and more on how Canadian culture would be engulfed in a tide of U.S. swill. He needed to sound less like a gowned legalist and more like an old, righteous, hand-on-the heart-legionnaire.⁴³

As previously noted, the historical lessons of 1891 and 1911 each seemed to suggest that electoral victory went to the leader who drew the sharpest emotional line around the issue. Even without a stump speech that called on the ghost of Macdonald's 'Old Man Canada,' Turner escalated his rhetoric and readied his battle cry. Shortly after the proposed agreement was announced on Oct. 4, 1987, the Liberal leader stood on the floor of the House of Commons and bellowed: "We did not negotiate this deal, we are not bound by this deal, we will not live with this deal, and if the deal and the final contract reflects the principles and the general terms of the agreement we have seen, we are going to tear the deal up."⁴⁴ Members of the Liberal caucus cheered this declaration and made

New Democratic Party candidates all across our land."

⁴³ Duffy, p. 319.

⁴⁴ *House of Commons Debates: Official Report*, Second Session – Thirty-Third Parliament, VIII, 22 September – 26 October, 1987, p. 10359. In Peter Maser's chapter "On The Hustings," in Frizell and

motions indicating they would follow their leader and tear up the deal. The oft-repeated use of the image of “tearing up” the agreement would serve the Liberals well in the upcoming campaign. It was also the kind of dramatic image that played well in the drama-oriented world of television. Following its tabling in the Commons and after working its way through the legislative process, the deal was held up by the Liberal-dominated Senate until an election or referendum could be held on the issue to let the people decide. The stage was set for a political showdown and an electoral rematch of the 1984 contest.

Changing Electoral Dynamics: What Made 1988 Different?

Almost a year to the day negotiators from both Canada and America signed off on the free trade agreement Mulroney visited the Governor General’s residence on Oct. 1, 1988 and asked her to dissolve Parliament in advance of a general election. Mindful of the problems pro-free trade politicians faced in 1891 and 1911, in the opening stage of the October campaign, as voters took initial stock of the platforms and candidates, Mulroney’s Progressive Conservatives moved quickly to set the agenda, groomed a sophisticated and appealing image that stressed control and management, and consolidated the party’s pro-free trade base. The party was at pains to frame the ballot-box question as a matter of which party and leader could best manage change in challenging times. They did not dare to promote the free trade agreement *per se* as the central issue in the campaign; rather, they attempted to bring it under a larger umbrella of good management and prosperity.

The Liberals, then registering near-historic lows in public opinion polls, became

others, he notes that Brian Mulroney “contrasted himself to Turner by saying the election was a contest between ‘Brian the Builder and John the Ripper,’” p. 72.

the focus of a death-watch among reporters.⁴⁵ The party seemed unable to frame their issues and consequently opened an opportunity for the news media to put their own stamp on what they offered. Internal squabbles were splashed across the front pages of newspapers and became the top items on news broadcasts. Perhaps most damaging of all, despite performing adequately on the hustings, John Turner was consistently judged to be the least desirable prime ministerial candidate – polling lower than ‘none-of-the-above’ and ‘no answer given.’⁴⁶ Commentators speculated that the party of Laurier, Mackenzie King and Pearson was in serious danger of yielding its status as the Official Opposition to the New Democratic Party – something NDP leader Ed Broadbent seized upon in some interviews.⁴⁷

The Ghost of Old Man Canada Haunts the Electorate

Public opinion polls and anecdotal evidence found in media reports suggest something quite unexpected happened about three weeks into the campaign. In the days following the beginning of the paid advertising period – the start of one of the most modern aspects of the campaign – on October 23 and the Leaders’ Debates on October 24 and October 25, Progressive Conservative fortunes took a nosedive while Liberal popularity improved markedly. The New Democratic Party, seemingly on the verge of becoming the largest opposition caucus in the House of Commons, was suddenly marginalized as the debate around free trade and the next government became polarized and the Liberals looked to be the party with the best chance to defeat the Progressive Conservatives.

⁴⁵ Campbell, p. A8.

⁴⁶ Duffy, p. 331. It should be noted, however, that the way in which a question is posed to a respondent can elicit skewed answers. For example, although Turner was judged least desirable as a first choice for prime minister, these polls did not measure his ratings overall in comparison to other candidates.

The general consensus among politicians, media commentators and political scientists was that a strong Liberal televised advertising campaign coupled with Turner's strong performance in the two televised debates contrasted sharply with the electorate's existing mediated perception of the Liberal Party and its leader. The other parties' uninspiring or middling advertisements and their leaders' unexceptional performances in the televised debates halted their momentum. For a brief period, the Liberals appeared to be on the cusp of forming a majority government and consequently tearing up the negotiated trade deal. However, the polls soon indicated this revival was relatively short-lived. On election night the Tories were returned to power and set about formalizing the free trade agreement. The Liberals and the New Democrats both improved their seat totals in Parliament and collectively won more votes than the deal's backers; however, neither party had accomplished all of its pre-election goals. The campaign had traveled a zig-zag road along a route that unmistakably reflected the power of the electronic media to frame issues and activate voter opinion.

Reading The Campaign's Entrails

How, then, to explain these frenetic fluctuations in popular opinion? How could a party on the brink of electoral disaster regain public trust and popularity so quickly? How could the least popular leader of a major party suddenly appeal to so many Canadians all across the country? How could the Liberals leap from third place in the polls to flirt with the possibility of winning a majority government, only to ultimately lose the election? How did the pro-free trade supporters manage to push back the nationalist tide that had historically swamped them twice before and looked set to wash over them again?

⁴⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

This thesis argues that the answers are simple yet astounding. Following a disastrous period of campaign reportage by the media, Turner and his Liberals used a stunning television advertising campaign to cultivate fear of the newly negotiated free-trade agreement and ignite the smoldering embers of nationalism and anti-American sentiment that had been such a powerful force in Canadian history. Subsequently, they revived their leader's image in the televised debates by mastering the medium's potential to speak directly to an audience in a highly emotional way; the party leader, so maligned by the media, and particularly by the televised medium, reversed his fortunes by embracing a public conduit which had only weeks earlier been key to his political malaise.

Subsequently, the Progressive Conservative party's strategists used the medium to unleash a stream of negative advertisements that effectively destroyed Turner's newfound credibility and popularity with the electorate. The pro-free traders could finally utilize a medium that could combat their opponents' emotional appeals quickly and effectively. Unlike the campaigns of 1891 and 1911, campaigns unfolded in a new ethos and a new tool was available to bail out a sinking campaign ship. The New Democratic Party's initial lackluster advertising and its leader's comparatively poor performance in the leader's debates, for instance, prevented the party from building upon its solid base and finding traction on a particular issue. As the debate over free trade became the defining and polarizing ballot-box question, the party's poor standings and electoral prospects hindered any hope of a revival of fortune or the ability to assume the role of leading opponent to the free trade agreement. In contrast, the Liberals' experience suggests these tools could permit a faltering campaign to regain its footing when a leader's message

crystallized effectively.

Voters Look To The Mass Media For Answers

Successful political strategy in this election and, by logical extension, all modern elections rested on a campaign team's ability to manage and master the mass media. Therefore, historians who endeavor to understand the dynamics of these campaigns must understand the role of the media and its influential capabilities. Essentially, they must discover why this free trade election could also be characterized as a "boob-tube election."

For all its seeming clarity as a defining issue in the election, the details of free trade and its potential effects confounded the electorate. At 315 pages,⁴⁸ the time required to read the U.S.-Canada free trade agreement in its entirety undoubtedly dissuaded some voters from examining the document in any detail. Moreover, the legalistic, technocratic and business language that was used in the draft also made for dense reading. Opinion polls placed the issue at the top of the minds of the majority of voters, but anecdotal evidence collected in media reports at the time suggested voters felt ill-informed and uneasy about the subject.⁴⁹ The sheer complexity of the issue, the intensity of the debate, and the volume of information coming from interested parties proved to be overwhelming for many Canadians. Nonetheless, the prominence of the issue in the media and its perceived importance to the country's future ensured a relatively high voter turnout of 75.3 per cent.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*. (Ottawa: External Affairs Canada, 1987), Copy 10-12-87. English version has 315 pages plus 9 pages of errata.

⁴⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 2 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁵⁰ *Voter Turnout at Federal Elections and Referendums, 1867-2004*. (Ottawa: Elections Canada), Accessed from <http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=pas&document=turnout&lang=e&textonly=false>, Internet.

Some voters, particularly those who remained undecided, used cues from the media to assist them in their decision-making process and became particularly susceptible to how the campaigns and their leaders performed. Mass communications scholar Matthew Mendolsohn's thought-provoking 1996 article in *The Journal of Politics*, titled "The Media and Interpersonal Communications: The Priming of Issues, Leaders, and Party Identification," suggests that, when confronted with such a complex debate, voters will opt for the leader of a political party which they deem best able to manage the country during uncertain times. Although they may not agree with the party's entire platform or ideology, these voters put their trust in its leader based on the image he had cultivated while in the spotlight.⁵¹ Managerial competence, but not ideological purity, Mendelsohn concluded, held the most sway over voters' sensibilities. The parties' and the media's intense focus on political leaders also conspires to shape the way in which people often remember a contest. Since the 1960s, elections in Western democracies had tended to emphasize leaders over parties. The 1960 American presidential election is, for instance, remembered as the Kennedy-Nixon election. Even in Canada's parliamentary democracy, where the vast majority of voters do not cast an individual ballot for the party's leader, the 1960s are framed by the Diefenbaker-Pearson clashes.

In an age when the vast majority of Canadians never saw a federal political leader in person, let alone found themselves in a position to have a meaningful conversation with him or her, electors who opted to cast their vote on the basis of leadership depended almost entirely on the mass media's ability to transmit the leader's message and the more intangible aspects of his or her personality and character. The written word can convey

⁵¹ Matthew Mendelsohn, "The Media and Interpersonal Communications: The Priming of Issues, Leaders, and Party Identification," *The Journal of Politics* 58, No. 1. (February 1996): pp. 112-125.

the substance of an argument, but lacks the power to fully reproduce the manner in which it was spoken. Radio broadcasting can transmit the subtle changes in the tone of a speaker and capture the pauses, urgency and emotion of an address, but the full picture is still missing. Although the medium can be problematic in terms of presenting a realistic and unbiased interpretation of an event (from the position of cameras, to editing, to post-production, to omissions of elements of a scene), television brings the sights and sounds of a distant subject into the homes of millions of people who would not normally otherwise expect to observe it. In short, the televised image is the closest approximation of reality for a mass audience and thus the most essential for academics to analyze and study. John Diefenbaker's rhetorical skill was thus, for instance, powerfully highlighted in the 1957 and 1958 federal campaigns.

In the 1988 federal election, three political party leaders and their respective campaign teams not only vied for voters' affections along traditional partisan lines, but also attempted to project a leadership persona that would appeal to elements of the electorate that remained undecided and unsure about an issue that could fundamentally change the course of Canada's development. In targeting these voters, the parties focused on one element of the mass media in particular: television. From the outset, therefore, the pulse and the excitement of the 1988 campaign seemed to be dictated by the imperatives of the electronic media in a way that Canada had never seen before.

A New Frontier For Political History

In essence, the 1988 federal election was decided, as this thesis will suggest, in large part on the basis of the television campaign. Major network news broadcasts and reporting put the election and its issues in a comprehensible context for the Canadian

voter and created powerful images of each party and its leader in their minds. In an attempt to either bolster or challenge these images, political parties responded by heavily relying on more direct and less mediated forms of contact with voters – most notably television advertising and the staging of a leader's performance in debates. Consequently, the public was manipulated by the new uses of television at the same time as they sought to use the medium to assist them in their decision-making process. Arguably, there was a double manipulation at work. The political parties consciously pandered to the electronic image-making and the media's stage-setting of the campaign by its own manipulation of issues and personalities compounded the finessing of viewers. One major purpose of this thesis is to open the debate over whether this manipulation is a detriment to democracy or simply a new manner in which the electorate forms its opinion.

After the crucible of the 1988 election, television had arguably become the most pervasive influence on non-committed voters. In a sense, this campaign became a turning point in modern politics as the leaders and parties fully exploited the potential of this medium and moved to integrate it into their strategy. Although politicians and party strategists were aware of the power of this medium during previous elections, the combination of television's unparalleled reach into the nation's households, the uniquely emotional nature of the dominant issue, and the increasing importance of party leaders and national campaigns ensured the medium would be a central and deciding factor in "Decision '88." In response to the political parties' exceptional manipulation of the electorate through the medium, and in part through broadcast news, the television news media would conduct a post-mortem of their election campaign coverage and identify ways to reassert control over the messages they helped to disseminate. Ironically, this

reaction, in addition to further advances in technology, the explosion of cable alternatives to the major television networks, and the splintering of the Canadian political spectrum would conspire to ensure the medium's influence on subsequent campaigns would begin to decline.

An examination of this fascinating period in Canadian politics reveals changing campaign dynamics and strategies that beg for more attention and study by scholars. Enterprising historians, who are mindful of new analytical approaches and techniques emerging from other disciplines, stand to gain a new appreciation, understanding and utility for modern political history by studying such a subject. Using this election as a case study, and by testing multi-disciplinary concepts of "perception," "agenda-setting," "framing," "priming" and "poll-based horse-race journalism," this research will attempt to demonstrate that the televised image of a political party and its leader became pivotal to the outcome of Canadian federal elections at this juncture in time. In doing so, this thesis will argue that the 1988 election may well offer a sharp break in the historiographic trajectory of Canadian political history. To adopt a McLuhanesque image, the medium in 1988 powerfully influenced the message. Unlike any Canadian election before it, the 1988 federal election was a battle fought on and for the country's television screens. Historians operating in the television age must, therefore, approach their studies with an eye to new types of sources and novel methodologies if they are to produce works that are necessarily reverential to the dynamics of a post-literate society.

**Chapter One - A New Perspective for “Old-Fashioned” Political Historians:
A Historiographical Examination of Election Campaign Writing**

In the foreword to Dan Azoulay’s study of Canadian Political Parties, an examination of the importance of political parties in Canadian history published in 1999, historian and general editor J. L. Granatstein suggests that political history is often considered “old-fashioned, boring, or the preserve of white, male practitioners.”¹

Granatstein, whose 1998 polemic Who Killed Canadian History? touched off a passionate historiographic debate between traditional political historians and new social historians, has long lamented the declining influence in academic circles of the old, top-down political studies. He believes the new historians are missing the grand view by concentrating on limited identities, previously marginalized historic characters, places and groups, and by derogating the importance of parliamentary institutions, politicians and linear, power-orientated narratives. But he also suggests that all is not lost for his beloved discipline. Granatstein contends that he “is absolutely certain that the pendulum of historiographical fashion will swing back towards a more reasonable position in which political history will be found at the centre.”²

Holding out hope for another paradigm shift that would restore the place of narratives and biographies in academic research and banish works on the implications of “house-maid’s knee in Belleville” to the attic of historical thought is akin to pining for a return to the age of horse and buggy and dismissing automobiles as a fad. Rather than remembering “the good old days” and rejecting the contributions of the social sciences, political historians would be wise to examine how they can draw upon these new

¹ Dan Azoulay, ed., *Canadian Political Parties: Historical Readings*. (Toronto: Irwin Publishers, 1999), p. ix.

² Ibid.

concepts and theories to bring exciting new perspectives and depth to their studies. As Azoulay notes in his own introduction, by refusing to change with the times, many political historians have of late forfeited some of their traditional territory to political scientists and journalists. "Of course, this authorship has meant that much of the newer work on political parties (or politics in general) lacks much in the way of historical perspective, for social scientists and journalists are naturally more present-minded than historians,"³ Azoulay states. Denis Smith's 1995 biography of John Diefenbaker, Rogue Tory, provides a good example of a political scientist trespassing on the historian's traditional turf.

If political history is to regain its former prestige, a methodological approach that combines the rich character and circumstance portraits of biographies and the sound rhetorical techniques of the traditional narrative with the powerful analytical tools of the social sciences would be a logical first step. Calls for such an approach are not a new phenomenon. John English, a former editor of the *Canadian Historical Review*, challenged historians to pick up the gauntlet in an inspiring article in that august journal in 1986. The author explains that "the troubles for political history began in the 1960s when the traditional came to represent not authority but fustiness or even repression."⁴ Although political history was predominant in Canada and the historian was, in English's words, "the guardian of national tradition,"⁵ the computerized revolution in the social sciences, ideological innovation and increasingly prominent regional cleavages represented a significant challenge to the traditionalists. With the study of limited

³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴ John English, "The Second Time Around: Political Scientists Writing History," in Carl Berger, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to Canadian History*. (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1987), p. 245.

⁵ Ibid.

identities now fashionable, “historians normally avoided the political and focused upon cultural, social, and economic concerns which seemed to offer these more limited identities more effectively.”⁶ Young historians, who found political history to be “sterile, excessively national in scope, too biographical, based on insufficient understanding of the country’s economic and social development, and lacking in an application of the sophisticated tools and methodologies of social sciences,”⁷ increasingly saw fit to abandon the narrow discipline of national history. Political history either moved away from the narrative tradition to employ new social science methodologies or explored limited identities on a local or provincial level. John English’s reinterpretation of the Borden administration as a progressive movement and David Bercuson’s work on regionalism in the 1970s typified this shift.

Surveying recent works on politics in the 1980s, English was “struck by the fact that so much political history is now written by political scientists, not historians.”⁸ When it was well-written and researched, such as Reg Whitaker’s authoritative examination of the federal Liberals, The Government Party, English praised the academics that have filled a void left by historians when they moved to the new histories. According to English, rather than being a tedious, theory-laden report, Whitaker’s extensive research into the Liberal party papers and related manuscript collections and his crisp and focused style offer an example of the best type of political study. However, English laments that “too much of the so-called new political economy is marked by scant knowledge of secondary works, by an overly elaborate theoretical exposition, and by a source-mining which seeks to extract precious historical ore while lacking awareness of the baser metals

⁶ Ibid., p. 246.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

in which it is found.”⁹ Thus, this limiting detachment from related historical works leaves ample room for renewed interest from political scientists’ and political economists’ colleagues in the history departments.

Nonetheless, English ends his piece on a cautionary note. “Today, political scientists like (Reg) Whitaker and David Smith are certainly reading history, but historians are, perhaps, ignoring the work of political scientists,”¹⁰ he writes. Moreover, English suggests that promising signs of interaction between the disciplines continue to face barriers. “Political economists,” he explains, “have largely focused on the recent past while Canadian social historians have concentrated upon the nineteenth and early twentieth century.”¹¹ He does hold out hope that the “eclipse of political history” is only temporary in Canadian historical writing; he has clearly issued a challenge to historians to resume their work in the field while being mindful of what has been written in their absence.

Could historians’ tendency to avoid the more recent past be an indication of their trepidation in exploring new types of sources and approaching their research from an unfamiliar perspective? In the past, political history tended to rely on traditional documentary source material such as letters, periodicals, census material, diaries and memoirs. Have the technological advances of the mass media revolution necessitated that modern researchers utilize electronic source material? Accordingly, do these new materials require scholars to adhere to new analytical rules? To what degree has the paper trail been challenged by the electronic record of human activity? To discover possible answers, a careful review of the development of political history in Canada – and, for the

⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 254.

purpose of this research, specifically its reading of significant federal elections of the past – is in order. Once a typology of past scholarly works is established, the present scholarship on the 1988 election will be more readily definable. Finally, if deficiencies in these manuscripts are revealed, possible remedies for future historical undertakings should become apparent.

Marking The Signposts: Histories Of Significant Elections Of The Past

Canadians have a well-known propensity for navel gazing and this trait is certainly evident in the works of the country's early national historians. We are a young nation with a fragile identity and our historians have consequently fixated on this precariousness. Celebrated national sages such as Harold Innis, Donald Creighton and A.R.M. Lower all deemed it necessary to explore the factors leading to the country's birth and its prolonged adolescence. Mindful of stresses on the new federation, less ink tended to be spilled on divisive issues in favour of more cohesion-building stories of early settlement, expansion and compromise. Witness, for example, the optimism in titles like Creighton's Canada: The Heroic Beginnings, or Arthur R.M. Lower's Colony to Nation: A History of Canada. Early professional Canadian historians were not willfully blind to when Canadians fell into warring ethnic camps, however. But, more often than not, the challenges brought forth by polarization of political thought or divisive election campaigns were portrayed to be inevitable bumps on the road to greatness and included in works that cast a wider and more inspirational net. These histories tended to focus on major political characters and most often adhered to the tenets of biographical writing, namely a linear narrative structure, detailed character development, exploration of personal and political relationships and generally qualitative analysis of accomplishments

and failures. Such historical writing rested heavily on archival collections and a close reading of the press. Such was the stuff of their history. Even works that featured no central character, such as Creighton's Empire of the St. Lawrence, often maintained a strong allegiance to narrative historical development by either narrowing in on secondary characters – Montreal's mercantile class, for example – or by anthropomorphizing the St. Lawrence.

These historians would also adopt a methodological approach modern practitioners continue to utilize in their own studies. Owing to the general dearth of secondary source materials, early national or political historians would cast a wide net for primary material in archives. Correspondence, diary entries, recorded speeches, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, personal and state papers, and occasionally interviews, would all be employed in their analysis. It is interesting to note the parallel here as male professional historians looked for the same kind of paper trail that characterized their own professional activities – memos, letters and the like. This was very much a gendered, class-based, authoritarian discipline. However, in the absence of critical theory created by the social sciences, these primary sources could mostly only be used in the context of their literal meaning. Their work was seldom nuanced by class, gender, or region. A pattern of behaviour might emerge in the relentless study of an individual subject, or offer some insight into his or her actions. Unfortunately, when this pattern failed to appear in an appreciable manner, commentary tended to be speculative and based almost solely on rhetorical argument and reason as opposed to proven fact and quantitative illustration. Although rhetoric and logic are valuable instruments, and this thesis certainly uses these techniques when crafting arguments, the addition of the social scientists'

empirically-driven theories and experiments to the historian's arsenal provides further depth and evidence to his or her research arguments.

Historians Tackle Electoral Behaviour

While this approach may have worked well enough for individual character studies, it proved to be very difficult to give a population much agency. This was particularly problematic when historians tackled events like elections. Without the aid of modern scientific tools such as opinion polls for measuring voter intention or extensive access to other objective sources such as ethnic or gender voting patterns, election results could not be interpreted authoritatively – at least not without some lingering doubts.

Take, for instance, Paul Stevens' review of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's attempt to wage a campaign on free trade in his 1970s edited volume The 1911 General Election: A Study in Canadian Politics. Stevens draws on traditional historical material – the manifesto of the Toronto 18, for instance. The author submits that the Conservatives, who in this election opposed free trade, “were successful in distorting the issue from the economics of reciprocity to the national and imperial question.”¹² He speculates that “this may have been the result of a majority of Canadians genuinely believing that reciprocity would be destructive of a Canadian nationality,”¹³ or the result of the opposition having superior organizational capabilities. As Stevens postulates, the Conservatives may have had the “personnel to put their position across at a time when the Liberals did not.”¹⁴ In both lines of thought, Stevens is somewhat tentative in his judgment, and it is with good reason. Without the benefit of tools to measure Canadian opinion, aside from the highly malleable final results, and lacking a thorough exploration of modern political tools like

¹² Paul Stevens, *The 1911 General Election*, (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970), p. 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

issue distortion and message transmission, the author is missing the key analytical ability to drive his arguments home. Stevens' study of the 1911 election is thus crafted of "old" political material, material oriented toward a social narrative purpose and shy of analytical insight into electoral behaviour.

Stevens acknowledges this very fact when he notes that "historians have long been fascinated with the problems of election analysis;" he finds it "surprising that historians in Canada have developed few of the tools required for more than a cursory study."¹⁵ Perhaps mindful of the increasing influence of the social sciences on historical thought at the time of his writing, Stevens endeavors to take some preliminary steps in considering voting behaviour in addition to describing the issues and characters involved in the campaign. To illustrate this, Stevens contends "a major factor in the Conservative campaign was the nation's press. Led by the *Montreal Daily Star*, the *Ottawa Journal* and the *Toronto News*, the Tory press became increasingly hostile to reciprocity proposals as the campaign progressed."¹⁶ Once again, ham-strung by a lack of detailed polling analysis, Stevens highlights the limitations of this argument by stating, "it is impossible to estimate how many voters a newspaper can affect;" however, he notes the *Canadian Annual Review* for 1911 concluded the *Star* was particularly instrumental in defeating the policy.¹⁷ The newspaper was one of the pioneers of mass circulation daily journalism and coupled with the rise of literacy rates, by 1911 journalists were in daily, broad contact with the nation and significantly dictated what voters would read about in advance of an

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁷ Ibid.

election.¹⁸ In sum, although Stevens is cognizant of the mass media's role in shaping public opinion, at the time of writing mass communications studies was still an emerging field of research, and he could not draw on very much literature.

Accordingly, despite his attempt to elucidate the agency of voters and mine their collective psyche, Stevens leans heavily on traditional sources that mostly chronicle the elite and its opinions. He collects primary and secondary sources, notably letters between political operatives, House of Commons debates on reciprocity leading up to the election, newspaper reports, recorded speeches from leaders, and previous historical writings on the contest. Stevens assumes the role of an editor who attempts to put the diverse readings into context in short commentaries in advance of each section. Without a full narrative treatment, this work thus appears to be a minor repudiation of the old biographical narrative. Moreover, Stevens' acknowledgement of the need for a greater examination of voter behaviour reveals the underpinnings trend away from top-down political history even if he is not fully able to separate himself from this approach.

Other historians have also attempted to give Canadian voters greater agency, but they have not exclusively focused on individual elections. Elizabeth Armstrong's dated but groundbreaking work on French Canadian nationalism in the First World War, for example, traced changes in attitude amongst an identifiable group of voters. Fought largely over the conscription question the 1917 federal election is actually a secondary

¹⁸ John Wadland and Margaret Hobbs note that during this period, the partisan press was still very much a fact of Canadian life in most towns and cities. However, "as the century advanced, published political and economic opinion became more sophisticated as the relationships between advertising and circulation strengthened." John H. Wadland and Margaret Hobbs, *The Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. II*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Plate 51. In effect, in order to bolster circulation and generate ad revenue, many newspapers targeted readership from across the political spectrum. For a more detailed and illuminating look at the press during this period, please refer to Minko Sotiron *From Politics to Profits: The Commercialization Of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890-1920*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

component of The Crisis of Quebec: 1914-1918, featured extensively only in a single chapter; however, the author's thorough examination of the palpable anger in the province during the issue's debate reveals other methods historians used to conduct a general reading of the public opinion. Armstrong cites military enlistment and recruitment numbers from the province to bolster her use of such standard primary sources as parliamentary debates, government reports, newspapers, pamphlets and ecclesiastical publications. She undoubtedly appreciated that hard numbers were necessary to corroborate anecdotal evidence of a shift in attitudes. Armstrong's book was first published in 1937. Had the author been working 50, 60 or 70 years later, she may have found social science theory and research studies could have further buttressed her arguments and reaffirmed her educated guesswork.

Armstrong's deference to newspapers and other periodicals of the day when calculating public opinion is striking. In most cases, she uses the editorial coverage of wartime issues as a barometer for general support for the war, and subsequently, for conscription. In her chapter on the 1917 election, for example, she refers to several newspapers time and again as a mirror of the electorate. In the span of a few pages, she habitually cites these sources: "With the exception of the Quebec *Événement* and to a limited degree the Montreal *Patrie* the Quebec press reflected French Canada's almost unanimous opposition to conscription,"¹⁹ "the rural press further demonstrated the practically unanimous feeling of the province on the election issue,"²⁰ and, finally, "The *Action catholique* reflected the divided feelings of the French Canadians."²¹ Once again,

¹⁹ Elizabeth H. Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec, 1914-1918*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 204.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

without standardized public opinion polling, Armstrong could only hypothesize that these publications genuinely expressed the sentiment of the community at large. One is left guessing how exactly the press mediated that opinion.

She also occasionally hints at another use of the print media. For instance, Armstrong contends “the most striking phenomenon in the first months of the war was the practical unanimity of all shades of Canadian opinion.”²² She attributes part of French Canada’s initial enthusiasm for the allied cause to support from the leading authority in Quebec at the time, the Roman Catholic Church. The author also expands upon the potential means this leading institution had at its disposal to impose its sentiment. “In the Catholic press the Church possessed another potent means of influencing the public opinion of Quebec which it used extensively throughout the war,”²³ she writes.

Armstrong’s heavy dependence on these publications to anchor her narrative on changing public opinion in Quebec is a notable element of this seminal work; however, without sophisticated analytical tools that subsequent theory and experimental trials in the social sciences would provide, these statements can not be accepted without a degree of suspicion.²⁴ Although conventional wisdom would indicate the press has the ability to both reflect and shape public opinion, without the benefit of empirical trials and studies, Armstrong’s early work leaves room for improvement and an opening for further rigorous academic work. She can, at least, be seen pointing the way for future writers who might have the benefit of additional studies into the relationship between the press and public sentiment.

A Political Scientist Takes The Reins

²² Ibid., p. 55.

²³ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁴ Armstrong wrote in the years before psephology became a science.

Four decades after the divisive 1917 conscription debates, another significant election would be chronicled and studied in a slightly more sophisticated and provocative manner. Political scientist John Meisel, author of the 1962 The Canadian General Election of 1957, informs the reader that his is “an exercise in contemporary history; but it is also a study in political science. As such, it is highly selective in what it records and analyses.”²⁵ Meisel explains that his intent is merely to report on the last gasp of the King-St. Laurent era, and not conduct a detailed review of the most of the events preceding or following the election. He is, therefore, aware that future historians will have ample opportunity to put the election campaign in greater context as time passes. However, Meisel’s preface offers an explicit invitation for interdisciplinary work. He presents his volume on the contest as not only an interesting contemporary exploration of Canadian politics and a turning point election, but also as an entrée for further historical investigation.

The author also expresses hope that his will be the first in a continuing series of election studies. Meisel offers as his inspiration the studies of elections in the United Kingdom sponsored by Oxford’s Nuffield College. He maintains that “the usefulness of any one electoral study increases with the publication of each subsequent volume.”²⁶ Admitting that the absence of many other Canadian election studies hinders his own analytical work, Meisel explicitly reveals the holes in the existing historiography. Clearly, early Canadian historians who had studied federal elections leaned so heavily on a narrative, linear interpretation that emerging political scientists were left wanting empirical data and analysis of voter behaviour.

²⁵ John Meisel, *The Canadian General Election of 1957*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962, p. vii.

²⁶ Ibid.

Before exploring Meisel's application of political science to key elections any further, it would be wise to gain an understanding of its method and theory. An excellent overview of the field can be found in Sylvia Bashevkin's 1985 book Canadian Political Behaviour: Introductory Readings. Bashevkin, a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto who is well-known for her research on women and politics, notes modern political science was born with the publication of Charles Merriam's 1925 critique of political scholarship, "New Aspects of Politics." Merriam argued that political researchers should adopt a scientific approach to their studies by using empirical evidence and observation-based methodologies already established by economists and psychologists.²⁷ Historians working out of the Annales School also saw a similar potential for understanding events and periods of time by using these different types of approaches.

By the 1950s, with electoral research dominating the American field of political behaviour, models of study became available for Canadian researchers.²⁸ Bashevkin cites John Meisel's analysis in The Canadian General Election of 1957 as one book which adopted empirical psephological analysis to trace the Liberal downfall. A subsequent extensive study of the 1965 election further established a substantive focus and incisive analysis of Canadian political behaviour.²⁹ Meisel also published "Working Papers on Canadian Politics" which "shaped much of what has followed in Canadian political behaviour," according to Bashevkin. He exploited advances made in public opinion

²⁷ Sylvia Bashevkin, ed., *Canadian Political Behaviour: Introductory Readings*, (Toronto: Methuen Press, 1985), p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

research,³⁰ including George Gallop's work in the U.S., and infused ideas from other social science disciplines in an attempt to get into the minds of voters. Although much of this research concentrated on topical phenomena, this method and the subsequent models formed are of definite value to political historians who seek to understand past campaigns.

With his credentials verified and his influence well-documented, a review of Meisel's early work on the 1957 election provides telling evidence of the growing divide between historians and political scientists. In spite of his acknowledged limitations, Meisel was most certainly not prevented from presenting a solid examination of an election he suggests "marked the end of one epoch in Canadian politics."³¹ The work might be described as an expanded election almanac. He briefly traces the development of major issues that hurt the governing Liberal Party in the eyes of voters, notably the manner in which the government cut off debate on the pipeline project, and notes the importance of the Progressive Conservative Party's 1956 convention in launching what some party members referred to as the "Diefenbaker revolution." As later chronicled in Peter Newman's book *Renegade In Power*, the election also took on a populist dynamic and featured a new style of reportage.

The most substantial section of the book deals with the actual campaign, however. It is here that readers will appreciate the author's grounding in the social sciences. Like Stevens' treatment of the 1911 federal election, Meisel casts an eye over the national party's organizational capabilities in both the headquarters and local constituencies. In addition to delving into primary sources to illuminate the relative strengths and

³⁰ See, for instance, the pioneering work of Robinson in Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy: Polling, Market Research, and Public Life, 1930-1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

³¹ Meisel, p. viii

weaknesses of each major party, he supplements his work with some of the admittedly few secondary sources that dealt with political electioneering. Throughout the book the author also presents and compares numerous tables detailing such information as how votes were cast, campaign expenses, and candidate age, occupation, education and religion.³²

What is especially interesting from the point of view of this thesis research is Meisel's examination of the media's involvement in the campaign and its use by the parties. Sensing a transition away from the importance of local constituency organization to nationally broadcasted campaigns, he makes several statements that reveal the prestige of the media, and increasingly the televised medium, which was used extensively in this campaign for the first time.³³ In his chapter outlining the role of the national headquarters in the campaign, for example, the author notes that senior Liberals believed the best way to exploit the medium was to familiarize the candidates with the technology. Here, he relates the party's renovation and conversion of a garage attached to headquarters into a private television studio. Meisel explains, "The premises were used to give 'illustrated' talks on the new medium to which Liberal Members of Parliament were invited. The broadcasting technique of several candidates who subsequently bought their own time on

³² Ibid. For example, Table VI/2, "Occupations of Liberal and Conservative Candidates by Region," pp. 128-129, is used when Meisel evaluates the assumption that in this campaign "Conservatives were more flamboyant and aware of public relations in their tactics." The author asks if "this difference [was] reflected in a larger representation, among Conservative candidates, of men experienced in the public relations industry or in the occupations demanding well-developed powers of persuasion?" Upon consulting his own compilation of occupation statistics in search of what he termed "persuaders" – men or women who worked as journalists, broadcasters, publicists, auctioneers, paid party officials and clergymen, but excluding educators and business people – he concludes that "if the main occupation party really did exhibit greater flair for good public relations, the cause must, therefore, be sought elsewhere than in the occupations of the Conservative candidates," p. 134.

³³ Ibid., p. 70.

a local station was probably first developed in the makeshift studio.”³⁴ The studio was also used to film numerous party programs and free-time broadcast messages. Moreover, television’s emergence as a powerful new electioneering tool was not lost on the Progressive Conservative camp. Unlike the Liberals, the party did not employ a full-time expert on the medium; however, careful attention was paid to each of the leader’s appearances and spots. Individual candidates who had the ability to appear on television were also sent a printed booklet with information on effective use of the new form of media.³⁵

In a chapter on constituencies, Meisel implicitly reveals another aspect of television’s burgeoning influence. In the days before the emergence of large scale broadcasting networks, newspapers, pamphlets, door-knocking and stump speeches were the primary means of bringing a candidate’s message to voters. In a country as geographically challenging as Canada and with a population with still large rural pockets, the chances of a leader directly presenting his message to a large number of people were slim to nil. Instead, local rallies and reprinted speeches or editorials in newspapers brought the message to the masses. As a result, local constituencies played a substantial role in any winning campaign. Meisel confirms this statement in an illuminating quote from The Canadian General Election of 1957. He writes:

There is an agreement among the major Canadian parties that the basic function of the constituency organization is to select a suitable candidate and to get him elected. This, it is thought, cannot be done primarily by *persuading* [the author’s own emphasis] eligible voters to support one’s own party, but rather by making sure that everyone who is already friendly towards it casts his or her ballot. The chief job of the riding association, therefore, is to find out who intends to support its candidate and then to make sure that everyone with such intentions carries them out on election day. The task of persuading people to vote for a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

particular party or person is left to the national leader and to the candidate himself who, it is often repeated, 'must sell himself to the voter.' The local activities are, of course, designed to facilitate the task of the national party and of course, designed to facilitate the task of the national party and of the candidate to persuade, cajole, and attract new voters, but the main effort is directed towards 'bring out the friendly vote.'³⁶

From Confederation through the first half of the 20th century, each of the two major political parties had a large and mostly solid "friendly vote." Occasionally, certain events, such as the Pacific Scandal of the early 1870s, would pry away voters or shift loyalties; but, generally, families (the male wing of them at least), ridings, regions, and ethnic and religious factions would be loyal to one party. The birth of protest parties early in the new century signaled that the age of life-long partisan loyalty might be coming to an end,³⁷ but as this thesis will demonstrate, television may also be listed as a factor in the rise of undecided or swing voters in elections. Moreover, the medium's persuasive effects are well documented, and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3. Although Meisel was working without the benefit of subsequent mass communication experimental trial results,³⁸ his statements, coupled with the political establishment's modern view that the importance of the constituency campaign was on the decline, suggest the television medium's impact would continue to grow.

Despite the absence of quantitative evidence of the medium's power in shaping voting opinion, Meisel offers several other passages which indicate that he grasps its revolutionary properties. For example, in an introduction to a section on political

³⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

³⁷ J. Murray Beck suggests that brokerage politics has long worked to mask class cleavages in Canada (p. 420) but these divisions and regional alienation persist. He also argues that some parties' tendencies to write-off large swaths of the country has unfortunately created periods of time when some provinces or regions are virtually left out of government or ignored until election time (pp. 421-422). J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power; Canada's Federal Elections*, (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

³⁸ See, for example Samuel Peter Regenstreif, *The Diefenbaker Interlude; Parties and Voting in Canada: An Interpretation*, (Toronto: Longmans Canada, 1965).

meetings in constituencies, he notes their importance while tempering his comments by stating they are “in danger of being made obsolete by television.”³⁹ Elsewhere, in a clever anecdote, the author relates the tale of a young Conservative supporter who attempted to give his candidate some free exposure. Noting the drawing power of American networks in Canada and political broadcasting restrictions, Meisel states the young Tory “succeeded in circumventing the rule when he appeared on a Buffalo television station’s programme carrying a sign bearing the words ‘Vote Conservative, Vote Diefenbaker!’”⁴⁰ The partisan evidently knew a segment would be filmed on location in front of the studio, so he emerged in the crowd to broadcast a message to the Golden Horseshoe region of southern Ontario. Furthermore, foreshadowing the now-conventional wisdom that political advertising is most effective when book-ending a news broadcast, Meisel points out that an election manual recommended this very strategy in 1957.

Finally, when examining the two leaders’ campaign styles, Meisel notes Diefenbaker’s style better lent itself to television broadcasts, and St. Laurent adamantly refused to adapt to the new medium. Meisel contends that Diefenbaker’s manner in presenting his material suggests that “he was, in a sense, a new political personality,” and it made his campaign “ideally suited for effective exploitation by the press.”⁴¹ He also states that the Progressive Conservative’s hortative speaking style captivated audiences. Although Meisel notes that transcripts of his speeches would reveal a jumbled mess and a stream of consciousness approach to the delivery, the audience would nonetheless be

³⁹ Meisel explains that as a “medium through which contact can be made with the voters” these meetings are still valuable. In the 1957 election, Meisel suggests the main types of meetings that occurred were “the usual” which featured an address by the candidate and/or a partisan guest, “the so-called contradictory meeting” where candidates from more than one party confront each other, and the increasingly popular and less formal “coffee or tea party.” Meisel, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 155.

transfixed by the actual delivery and could only assume he knew what he was saying, but had so many important things to say that “it was impossible to compress everything into the usual form employed by public speakers.”⁴² Diefenbaker’s rich metaphors and Christian imagery completed this oratorical package.

By comparison, St. Laurent’s “speeches were carefully written and constructed briefs, delivered in an unemotional style befitting an elder statesman.”⁴³ Filled with long platitudes of past successes and hard-to-digest statistics, St. Laurent’s texts were ill-suited for media that thrived on emotion and vigor. The Liberals had faith in their leader and privately joked they’d run him stuffed if they had to. Unfortunately, he may have well been stuffed for his lack of energy in front of the television cameras. As Meisel writes, “The Prime Minister made few concessions to the new medium. He tended to read his script as he would have in a radio broadcast. Even the use of the teleprompter failed to make his performance more relaxed. He was unable to overcome his objections to make-up or ever to feel really at home before television cameras. He, therefore, appeared somewhat wooden and unexciting.”⁴⁴ Diefenbaker, by way of comparison, reportedly had no objection to make-up and was prepared to employ any method to improve his performance. In all, “he appeared more relaxed than the Prime Minister and his television broadcasts seemed to have been as convincing to his viewers as his personal appearances had been to those attending his meetings.”⁴⁵ For the first time in Canadian electoral history, the electronic projection of image had played a determining role in a federal election.

⁴² Ibid., p. 156.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 163-164.

Meisel's study of this campaign is a significant point of departure from notable works on previous elections. Perhaps owing to its recent occurrence there was much more data available to analyze. For example, in addition to the standard exploration of issues and organization, the author's use of socio-economic information, statistics, and published opinion polls give his tentative insights into voter behaviour more weight. Although some of his arguments rely on a degree of intuition, Meisel's early thoughts on the role of television in the campaign are also very instructive and helpful for future historians who are studying this element in campaigns. This tome also continued to erode the necessity of the traditional historical narrative in political writing. The author bows somewhat to the compartmentalizing norms of the social sciences and neatly organizes the components of an election without drawing on them to explain events as the campaign unfolded. Some remnants of the old historical method are still present, yet this book fits more easily with later electoral studies by political scientists as opposed to traditional historical works. Historians were beginning to lose their privileged place in the telling of the nation's electoral past.

The Swinging Sixties And The Birth Of The Instant Historian

In contrast to Meisel's more staid and analytical study, Peter C. Newman⁴⁶ brought a journalist's flare for colourful, yet succinct, prose to his popular account of the 1957 campaign. In his 1963 Renegade In Power: The Diefenbaker Years, Newman, who normally plied his trade as a correspondent for *MacLean's Magazine*, attempted to write a "provisional, personal and entirely unauthorized assessment of the reign of the

⁴⁶ Peter C. Newman is an example of a quintessential "fuselage journalist" – a term is used to describe the members of the press corps who tag along with politicians as they travel.

thirteenth Prime Minister of Canada.”⁴⁷ Although he was at pains to inform the reader that he had not attempted to write a definitive political biography of Diefenbaker, noting such a task must wait until his correspondence and state papers are made available, Newman attested that he undertook this work because he does not want “to allow the record of the astounding politician... to be obscured by the tender cloak of forgetfulness which has been drawn around some of his predecessors.”⁴⁸

Although some professional historians have decried his methods, in later works Newman’s attempt to catch “history on the run” in the 1950s and 1960s is an undeniable part of the evolution of Canadian political historiography and a style that continues to dominate best-sellers lists. Renegade In Power contains intermittent mention of campaigning practices of the time and relatively brief chapters on the Progressive Conservative leader’s campaigns for national office; however, Newman endeavours to write a more over-arching, flowing narrative account of his subject’s political life and does not get bogged down in the minutiae of campaigns. As such, the book, like other biographies, mostly offers some telling anecdotes for historians to employ when conducting more extensive studies of elections. Whatever its methodological shortcomings, Newman’s book brilliantly captures the day-to-day electricity of modern Canadian electoral politics.

Newman’s main contribution to the political historian’s tool kit is his instructive use of oral interviews, many of which were conducted during Diefenbaker’s term in office and not after-the-fact as memories faded and revisionists began to challenge the prevailing views. The author’s unique access to information from many close confidants

⁴⁷ Newman, Peter C., *Renegade In Power: The Diefenbaker Years*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1963), p. ix.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

and opponents of his subject allow him to create a fascinating portrait of the man and his times. Unlike historians operating in the distant future, Newman, through his employment, had the ability to conduct thousands of interviews over the course of the Diefenbaker era in Canadian history. He explains in his acknowledgements that many of his sources spoke “off the record.” This is an admission that might concern scholars who wish to confirm the veracity of some quotes or information, but the value of this extensive oral history and Newman’s reputation as a prominent journalist surely preclude ignoring it entirely or not giving it serious consideration. Moreover, as a journalist who traveled with Diefenbaker and had much experience observing his subject in full political flight, Newman’s pronouncements, while not grounded in academic theory, can be co-opted for further analysis.

For example, as a complementary account to Meisel’s passages, Newman’s observations on Diefenbaker’s engaging campaign style, between “cold” hard-print journalism and “hot” electronic journalism, offer additional insight into one of the factors that made the Conservative leader so well-suited for the transitional age. He notes:

During the Diefenbaker years the majority of Canadians never saw the Prime Minister Ottawa insiders gradually came to know. Most people saw him only as a television performer or as a campaigner during general elections. He was supremely effective in both roles. The daily cycle of Diefenbaker’s incredibly energetic election campaigning was set up to allow him maximum time for meeting his fellow Canadians. To every person pushed by the crowds to within range of his handshake, he’d give for however brief a moment his full attention. He would look straight into a face as if determined never to forget it, firmly grasp the outstretched hand, and move on.⁴⁹

Newman draws similar attention to the Progressive Conservative leader’s ease in managing television appearances. In sum, although Newman’s “history-on-the-run” cannot and does not attempt to present a definitive review of the Diefenbaker era, his

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

thorough use of oral history and his first-hand experience as a political reporter permit him to write a fresh and intimate biographical treatment of an engaging character. As he correctly states, a more complete portrait with fresh archival revelations only emerged after the release of state papers and as the passage of time allows historians to put the period in a larger context and narrative; however, Newman has ably conducted some preliminary research future scholars can and must build upon.

A more stand-offish style of biographic treatment, this time of St. Laurent, was written by political scientist Dale C. Thomson in 1967. Published some 10 years after he left office, Louis St. Laurent: Canadian also relies heavily on interviews with people who knew the man, newspaper articles, some radio addresses, *Hansard*, and the limited secondary source material available at the time. The author, who worked as St. Laurent's associate private secretary from 1953-1958 and continued to be involved in Liberal Party politics throughout his life, also wrote the biography, Alexander Mackenzie: Clear Grit. In Louis St. Laurent: Canadian Thomson gives a brief account of his subject's childhood and his formative years, but tends to focus almost exclusively on his political career. Like Newman's work on Diefenbaker, and most other political biographies, major legislative work, the day-to-day function of government, and professional relationships are put under the most intense scrutiny; the campaign for office necessitates some mention, but it is mostly a fairly general synopsis and not an in-depth analysis. Nonetheless, if a deeper understanding of the modern forces that drive a campaign are missing, revealing comments are not. Once again, the importance of the leader is highlighted by the author. Shortly before a 75th birthday celebration for St. Laurent staged by the party, Thomson retells the story of a conversation about the Liberals' electoral prospects in 1957:

Liberal strategists spared no effort to persuade him that his rightful place was at the party helm for as long as his health allowed. His work schedule could be reduced, they argued, and his share of the election campaign limited to a few television speeches and appearances in the principal cities. When a younger member of the team mentioned that the Liberal Party needed some kind of an election program, he was told: 'St. Laurent will be seventy per cent of the campaign. What do we need a program for if we have him?'⁵⁰

A cynic might suggest Thomson was giving attention to information that flattered his subject (and former employer); however, polling numbers, another tool available for modern political historians, bolstered that party strategist's statement. An April 27, 1957 poll conducted as the campaign commenced revealed the Liberals enjoyed 47 per cent of the electorate's support compared to 32 per cent, 19 per cent and 11 per cent for the Tories, Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the Social Credit Parties, respectively.⁵¹ But as Thomson explains, "most encouraging of all, 74 per cent of the persons interviewed considered that Louis St. Laurent was doing a good job as Prime Minister."⁵² St. Laurent was a substantively positive element of the party's overall package. However, Thomson goes on to explain that the Liberal leader's old-fashioned style hurt his performance during the first widely televised campaign and thereby tended to undermine his party's initial appeal:

The Prime Minister's television appearances were undoubtedly the weakest aspect of his campaign. He had adapted well to radio broadcasting on first entering public life, but he took a dislike to television on the grounds that programs were carefully prepared performances similar to stage shows and that they did not present a true-to-life picture of the politician. He considered teleprompters and make-up theatrical devices designed to deceive the public. In vain, his advisers tried to convince him a teleprompter would enable him to communicate his views more effectively to his fellow citizens, and that make-up merely corrected the effects of the strong studio lights, which accentuated wrinkles and blemishes not visible under normal conditions. Becoming adamant, he threatened at one point to use the aids, but to begin his appearance by

⁵⁰ Dale C. Thomson. *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian*. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), p. 498.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁵² *Ibid.*

explaining that he was using a teleprompter and wearing grease-paint, so that no one would be able to feel he was trying to create a false impression. He made three television broadcasts during the campaign, but read his text with scarcely a glance at the camera, and he looked much older than usual. Liberal Party strategists concluded that he was right to use the new medium as little as possible and to concentrate on showing himself personally to as many voters as he could.⁵³

Thomson's views once again reveal an appreciation of the new medium of television in election campaigns and are peppered with some valuable anecdotal evidence about St. Laurent's personal dislike of the unpredictable elements that television introduced to politics. Yet, he forsakes any attempt to expand upon the impact of television and fully analyze the medium's effects in theory and practice in favour of a more general commentary. He prefers to continue seeing organization and issues as the primary focus of a campaign to the detriment of presentation and message transmission. Thomson's analysis adheres to the more familiar narrative elements so frequently utilized in biography. To use an analogy, he spends his time describing a luxury car's smooth performance and handling and polished exterior while never giving an extensive look under the hood.

The Informants: Campaigns As Seen From The Inside

A fourth type of campaign account also emerges in a historiographical survey of this period in political history. In addition to the political scientist-turned-contemporary historian, the fuselage journalist-cum-instant-historian and the traditional biographer, the work of an insider – such as political strategists or operatives – as an author takes its own place on the bookshelves of libraries. In 1994's Trumpets and Drums: John Diefenbaker on The Campaign Trail, Dick Spencer, who served for 15 years as president of the former prime minister's local riding executive, writes a glowing account of Diefenbaker's

⁵³ Ibid., p. 512.

exciting pursuit of power as “his friend and follower.”⁵⁴ While Meisel, Newman and Thomson try to impress their partisan neutrality on the reader (although Thomson is sometimes questionable), Spencer readily admits his bias. Like Newman, who offered the foreword to this volume, Spencer eschews the academic style of rigorous footnoting and bibliography, and, with a nod to his affiliation, he makes no attempt to assume the role of a disinterested observer. However, his moving personal stories and his unique ability to expose the hidden maneuverings of a campaign that a reporter can never fully see provide some interesting insights. For instance, in describing Diefenbaker’s 1957 run in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Spencer describes the scene of a buzzing campaign office where phones were being worked off the hook and plans were being made for “the biggest goddamned parade we ever had,” and “the biggest goddamned cavalcade we ever had.”⁵⁵

Although the account is mostly matter-of-fact and not analyzed in any great detail, a careful eye can spot some evidence to support the notion that leaders were becoming more important in Canadian election campaigns. Spencer writes, “[Diefenbaker] had ‘been across Canada,’ as he said, and he knew from the mounting crowds and clamour that he was making a difference. He knew that ‘he’ was making the difference! It was ‘time for a Diefenbaker government’ Not a Tory government, but a Diefenbaker government.”⁵⁶ Moreover, while Spencer does not plow into the deep implications of how the emerging broadcast media assisted in the coming of age of the new political personality, he does admit “the remarkable thing about the Diefenbaker myth [the legendary campaigner] is that it grew in the glare of the modern electronic

⁵⁴ Dick Spencer, *Trumpets and Drums: Diefenbaker on The Campaign Trail*. (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1994), p. ix.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 36

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

media.”⁵⁷ Diefenbaker’s television-based public image was necessarily multifaceted and multi-dimensional.

He also draws attention to the fact that Diefenbaker, unlike earlier leaders, was “doing battle in a modern Canada, had many larger, volatile and unpredictable constituencies to address.”⁵⁸ Spencer notes “Diefenbaker understood the power of television and cultivated that medium. He emerged as a good television performer, curbing his court room histrionics and bringing himself reasonably coolly and comfortably into the Canadian living room. He was the first Canadian prime minister to use television as a means of campaigning.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, Spencer also draws the link between the medium and the message. “John Diefenbaker knew that voters make their choices by instinct and emotion as well as by judgment,” Spencer confirms. “He touched their instincts and emotions as no one had done since Macdonald.”⁶⁰ Thus, Trumpets and Drums serves as an additional source for academic historians, and a further example of the type of history employed by writers exploring past Canadian campaigns. If Newman was a fuselage journalist, Spencer was the complementary consummate insider. Neither attempted to write a history in the style of a Creighton or Lower or Innis, but each filled a growing void in the writing of contemporary political history, and each would become a fixture in the writing about modern Canadian elections.

Political Scientists Supplant Political Historians

Studies of more recent elections have continued down diverging paths. The most noticeable element in post-1960s political studies has been the explosion of political

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 192.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 195.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 196-197.

science interpretations. Rising to Meisel's challenge, Howard R. Penniman edited a collection of articles that thoughtfully examined the 1979 and 1980 elections. Canada at the Polls: 1979 and 1980, published in 1981, admirably examines various components in the back-to-back elections that briefly saw the Progressive Conservatives break 16 years of Liberal rule, and then subsequently restored Trudeau to office for a final term. The authors not only study the factors that likely facilitated the change, notably voter behaviour, campaign strategy, regional variances, and party finances, but they also attempt to give some historical context to Canada's system of government and elections.⁶¹

The role of the mass media, and particularly television, was also given considerable coverage in this volume, once again suggesting that the way in which campaigns were relaying messages to voters was changing. Frederick J. Fletcher, an associate professor of political science at York University who specializes in studies of mass communications, public opinion and voting, contributes a fascinating account of how the media reported on the campaign and how the parties and candidates attempted to manipulate them. What is particularly striking about Fletcher's contribution, an essay titled "Playing the Game: The Mass Media and the 1979 Campaign," is his use of a combination of personal interviews and the newly emerging literature on media and campaigns from mass communications and political science departments. Whereas previous generations of scholars were confined to using mostly educated guesses and developing theories to explain their observations, the advances in data-driven experimentation and case studies from the social sciences give Fletcher's analysis much

⁶¹ As detailed in Chapters Four and Five, in the 1980 election the Liberals deliberately downplayed Trudeau's personality and emphasized their team. A strong leader could sometimes hurt a party's chances.

more intellectual weight. For instance, in drawing on research on voter choice by Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon H. Pammett, Fletcher is able to state confidently:

In the process of competing for votes, the parties and leaders are engaged in a contest to get media attention and to determine the issues around which the campaign will revolve. Other things being equal, the party that wins these contests can expect to win the competition for the allegiance of the uncommitted voters and, perhaps, the election. In another sense, the parties compete with the news organizations to determine who will set the campaign agenda. And reporters and news organizations compete among themselves for 'scoops' and, more important, for prestige. For political reporters, elections are 'the Olympics of news coverage.'⁶²

These statements could certainly apply to other elections in the mass media age; however, the evolution of discourse in the social sciences meant they could actually be cited with a degree of authority.

By the 1980s, scholars, journalists and participants had all come to recognize that elections were no longer top-down affairs to be analyzed in Olympian fashion. Elections were now about image, managing that image and then measuring the public response to the message.

In the rush to embrace this new perspective on Canadian electoral study, the historical perspective has often been neglected. Although Fletcher makes an effort to put the media in this campaign in context with previous campaigns, he mostly draws upon the immediate past. To illustrate this, he contends "the coverage patterns and party-media relations tended to be extensions of trends observed in 1974,"⁶³ referring to his own chapter in a previous edition of this series. Although some notable historical moments are recorded – the first real televised debate in Canadian federal electoral history on May 13,

⁶² Howard Penniman, ed., *Canada at the Polls, 1979 and 1980: A Study of the General Elections*. (Washington: American Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981), p. 281.

⁶³ Ibid.

1979, for example – the tendency of political scientists to be present-minded, rather than adhering to the idea of the *longue durée*, is reinforced in this article. Ultimately, however, as academic historians have ceded this territory to social scientists, biographers, political insiders, and journalists, the historical method and approach to this subject matter has also lost some of its luster.

Where do Historians Go From Here?

In retrospect, circumstances have conspired against a thorough retelling of elections by historical scholars and the job has been left to a coterie of biographers, journalists, campaign insiders and political scientists. In an interesting parallel development, the teaching of political history in Canadian universities has been in the doldrums over the last few decades. Political history has been seen to lose its relevance in a world of “bottom-up” historical narratives. This is ironic when all the evidence points to the fact that elections are becoming “bottom-up” themselves. At the very moment new methodological approaches were being developed and these writers began to share their knowledge, traditional political history had become passé. As English explains in his 1986 article calling for a return to political history writing, young scholars rapidly populating university departments viewed the old history with disdain, and political histories went into decline.

English remains optimistic that a revival of political history is in the offing, however. He points to Lawrence Stone, a well-known “new historian” who has detected “evidence of an undercurrent which is sucking many prominent ‘new historians’ back again into some form of narrative.”⁶⁴ It is difficult to ignore the conclusion that power and its exercise in society is an inescapable topic of historical investigation. This should

⁶⁴ English in Berger, p. 255.

not be taken as proof of any kind of pendulum shift that Granatstein has prophesized, however. Instead, it could mean a softening in the ideological position of one side of the divide that should be met in kind. Instead of just nodding knowingly that the new historians have realized the folly of their ways, the old historians must also explore what these new scholars have learned through their extensive detour around historical narrative. Political historians would do well to remember that the “new histories” have prospered because they have so freely borrowed from the social sciences. Where would social history be without the insights of sociology and demography? In essence, a synthesis of traditional historical techniques, narrative elements and social science theory and research could very well prove to be requisite to the field’s future relevance and success.

Strangely enough, social scientists have been the biggest cheerleaders for this proposal. In a chapter in McCombs, Shaw and Weaver’s Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory, Edward Caudill suggests historians are missing an opportunity to apply his discipline’s work for their own benefit. In “An Agenda-Setting Perspective on Historical Public Opinion,” Caudill writes:

Agenda setting... provides a unique tool by which historians, like paleontologists reassembling fossilized bones, can reconstruct an extinct creature; in this case, historical public opinion. Like paleontologists, historians will never see the complete animal in its natural environment, but they can learn more about the dimensions and life of the creature with disciplined, systematic research and logical deduction from existing evidence.⁶⁵

Historians would be able to make better and more accurate statements if they

⁶⁵ Maxwell McCombs and others, eds., *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), p. 169.

utilized this concept when examining the dynamics of past public opinion.⁶⁶ Should political historians take his advice they would be on the cusp of a new era in the understanding of political behaviour. And elections perhaps offer the best laboratory in which to begin this new approach to the past.

Rather than condemning the new historians for ending the dominance of the “old boys club,” political historians must be willing to adapt their approach to the changing times. Their works would likely become far more relevant if they were to accept the research of their peers in other academic fields and adopt a multidisciplinary ethic while retaining a style that has served them well in the past.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

Chapter Two - Before the dust settled: An examination of the existing literature concerning the 1988 federal election and a series of modest proposals for reappraisal

Two years after John English issued his plea for a return to writing political history in the *Canadian Historical Review*, the country was on the cusp of an event ripe for eventual historical review and analysis. The 1988 federal election was fought largely over a proposed free trade agreement with the United States – an issue which, as already noted, had been the subject of two previous highly divisive campaigns. Virtually every aspect of the election battle ensured it would become an epic contest. The Progressive Conservatives looked to secure a second consecutive majority government – a feat not attempted since Diefenbaker's ill-fated run in 1962 and not accomplished since Macdonald's dominance in the 1800s (the 1917 Unionist win, while essentially a Tory victory, will always have an asterix beside it). The Liberals, wounded badly in the previous campaign, hoped for redemption, yet braced themselves for more setbacks. The NDP, meanwhile, believed it could translate the popularity of and respect for their leader, Ed Broadbent, into a greater share of the vote, more seats in the House of Commons, and ultimately more influence. If the partisan struggles were not enough, the outcome of the election would determine the fate of the free trade deal, and, correspondingly, the economic future of the country. All signs therefore pointed towards 1988 being a significant election and a likely turning point in Canadian history. In effect, it was a juncture over which the political historians of old would have salivated.

Academic historians were not the first out of the gate to study the campaign, however. The job of providing immediate reaction fell to an assembly of other authors. Popular historians, journalists, party insiders, and contemporary biographers were the first to comment upon and study this dramatic event in Canadian politics, while social

scientists, who needed slightly more time to compile and analyze statistics, were following closely behind. As per usual, academic historians appeared to take refuge in the conceit that the dust must settle before they took pen in hand. Commenting-on-the-run does not come easily to academics; they prefer an “on the one hand, on the other hand” approach to analysis. It is therefore incumbent on an academic historian, coming so late to the game, to review the existing literature before endeavouring to put his or her own unique stamp on the event. He or she can take comfort in the fact that, while the path of study of a major event such as a modern election campaign is well-worn by the time they set foot on it, there are always new approaches waiting to be explored.

The Journalists: History Of The 1988 Election Written On The Run

It has been said that journalists write the first draft of history. During the 1988 campaign dozens of television, radio and print reporters followed the leaders on the campaign trail and explored many other facets of the race. In addition to fulfilling their daily journalistic responsibility of bringing electoral events and personalities into the homes of the nation, some journalists and editors used the information they gathered during the campaign to present a quickly-minted retrospective and narrative. Once the lawn signs had been taken down and the newly re-elected government moved to implement its agenda, these writers reflected on the immediate past.

As previously discussed, in the second half of the 20th century, public affairs saw the emergence of a new breed of commentator – the journalist turned instant historian. The resulting sub-genre of political writing received an early endorsement when the 1962 Pulitzer Prize committee bestowed its coveted prize on Theodore White, a well-known magazine correspondent, who wrote the groundbreaking *The Making of the President*.

1960. In the company of his Canadian doppelganger, Peter C. Newman, White exemplified journalistic history. However, unlike Newman's fresh review of the span of the entire Diefenbaker government, White focused on a single electoral campaign. Quite aware that "though later historians would tell the story of the quest for power in 1960 in more precise terms with greater wealth of established fact, there might, nonetheless, be some permanent value in the effort of a contemporary reporter to catch the mood and the strains, the weariness, elation and uncertainties of the men who sought to lead America in the decade of the sixties."¹ White, in fact, used many of the sources of professional political historians, including interviews, existing journalistic accounts and opinion polls and related quantitative data; however, his tight deadlines made reflection on other contemporary studies, particularly by social scientists, difficult, if not impossible.

Perhaps the best example of this new style in the context of the free trade election can be found in Graham Fraser's Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988. Trained as a historian, Fraser later ventured into the media fray as a reporter for the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*. Using his notes from the campaign and subsequent interviews with political actors, party strategists, and others involved in the campaign, Fraser presented an intimate description of the event. His account alternated between the campaign the public saw through the news and the backroom strategy and private moments that could only be revealed once all the votes were counted. Using anecdotes gleaned from his reporting, and filling in some of the blanks with information from secondary sources, Fraser deftly wove an intense, emotional and occasionally provocative tale of three party leaders navigating the choppy waters of the campaign.

¹ Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1960*, (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1961), p. vii.

Fraser is, however, also conscious of the historian's craft and also delves into historical accounts of past federal elections fought over the issue of free trade and attempts to draw some comparisons. Although his focus is mostly on the partisans involved in the campaign, both in front of and behind the cameras, he does track how public opinion shifted dramatically over the course of the weeks leading up to election day. Fraser cites opinion polls commissioned by various media organizations and directly connects sudden shifts in the mood of the electorate with key events reported during the campaign. Although he does not ever venture into the theory behind such mass communication concepts as agenda-setting, priming and framing (concepts defined and explored in greater detail in the following chapter), nor does he have access to the later studies which employ these concepts in the context of the 1988 election campaign, he and his sources are clearly aware of the dramatic impact of new forms of media.

For example, in his chapter on the governing party's tour preparations, Fraser mentions that Stuart Murray, a former rock 'n' roll tour manager, drew on his experience as an advance man. He writes:

His responsibility had been to make sure the tours ran smoothly, that everyone got paid, and that everything looked right: the stage, the lights, the backdrop. It was the ideal training for a Prime Minister's Office in the television age, for the jobs were very similar. Murray came to the PMO with a sense of what made a road show work, how to put the performer at ease and enable him to deliver his show. He knew that, regardless of the speech Mulroney was going to make, if it was a visual failure, the message would not be delivered. People absorbed their information from television.²

Here, Fraser states the conventional wisdom of mass media theorists in layman's terms and gives an indication of its practical usage. This is precisely the type of evidence

² Graham Fraser, *Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1989), p. 181.

this thesis desires to expand upon as it draws on other disciplines' theories and the corresponding studies that provide evidence to support them.

Another popular and well-regarded journalistic account of the free trade election can be found in Robert Mason Lee's 100 Monkeys. Published around the same time as Fraser's book, Lee, a reporter at the *Ottawa Citizen*, takes a decidedly more tongue-in-cheek approach. Beginning each chapter with a quote from a notable personality for inspiration, from pop songwriter Randy Newman to philosopher Immanuel Kant, the author proceeds to construct a lively narrative with the underlying purpose of explaining the phenomenon behind voter volatility in the campaign and how the electorate ultimately made up its collective mind. Through the course of the tale the reader becomes acquainted with Tory pollster Allan Gregg's explanation for the volatility, namely "millennial anxiety,"³ and Lee's preliminary reading into why the chips fell the way they did – voters used "popular wisdom" to find their way through "the muddle of semantic chaos and political illusion, of tangential motive and opaque reasoning."⁴ While Lee's own conclusions sound like a retread of the familiar political line so many victorious and defeated candidates utter on election night – "the people are always right" – his book is a worthwhile template for a political history of an election.

Although he avoids the stringent demands of academic style, notably by placing the information normally found in footnotes or bibliography in the body of the text, Lee's captivating narrative guides a reader through the twists and turns of the campaign.⁵ There is, nevertheless, room for additional scholarly work. As previously noted, histories

³ Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys*, (Toronto: MacFarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 70.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵ For example, Lee writes extensively about a potential leadership coup in the Liberal Party and chronicles the both the backroom discussions and the public reaction. *Ibid.*, p. 158-172.

written on-the-run, especially when composed for popular consumption, eschew the theoretical for the practical. Once again, while a journalist writing history can offer insightful anecdotes, an academic historian who has sought out the meaning behind these stories, and one who has an adequate analytical canvas, can infuse them with greater meaning and paint an even clearer picture.

Behind The Scenes: The Insiders

A similar fount of information about campaign preparation and strategy in 1988 comes from the campaign teams themselves. In 1989's Election: The Issues, The Strategies, The Aftermath, David Stewart-Patterson, a reporter with the *Globe and Mail's* "Report on Business," compiled the stories of a campaign strategist from each respective party, namely NDPer Gerald Caplan, Grit Michael Kirby and Tory Hugh Segal. All three men are credited as co-authors while the editor remains a ghost-writer. Conscious of his sources' partisan loyalties, the editor interviewed each strategist separately during the campaign in order to facilitate a timely post-election release.⁶ The triumvirate presents a conventional linear narrative of the campaign; and, although their aim is also to tell a compelling story, like Fraser, Caplan, Kirby and Segal provide some interesting, if incidental, commentary on the strategy behind developing a successful campaign formula, including how they manipulated and responded to the media.

Putting their ideas into broad historical context, the authors explain that tactics became more complex and more subtle "as populations outgrew the simple and direct persuasion possible in Athenian democracy."⁷ They elaborate:

⁶ Gerald Caplan and others. *Election: The Issues, the Strategies, the Aftermath*. (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1989), p. vii

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Where once one might depend on good rousing speeches in public and the manipulation of vote-buying and rotten boroughs behind the scenes, today's political strategists have a wider variety of tools at their disposal, and far more complicated problems to be solved as well. The techniques range from subtle media manipulation – the careful planning and logistical arrangements that result in their candidates being portrayed most favourably on the television screens of the nation – to the ingenious methods of modern polling, the use of carefully crafted questions to random samples of the population to draw out the current standing of the party and the reasons behind its movements.⁸

Unfortunately, the book's rushed release, so soon after the election, hindered any attempt the authors made to reflect upon theoretical concepts, although it stands to reason they would have declined an invitation to bring up the relevant literature or become too bogged down in theory. Like Fraser, these strategists-cum-popular-historians were mostly commenting on events as they unfolded for a wide audience that might not care for a more technical vocabulary or advanced lesson. Thus, although the book does an admirable job of summing up the campaign, it fails to give it anything more than a cursory examination. This is a foot soldier's report. A historian must assume the role of a commander, compiling these anecdotes and using existing knowledge and theory to gain a better understanding of what it means in the larger scheme of things.

Nevertheless, this type of insight is essential to understanding the 1988 election as a media campaign. Due to its very communicative nature, studying the impact of media necessitates investigating the people who construct a message, the mode of transmission, and those who receive it. The old political history tended to concentrate on the major characters, issues or organization of a political campaign and was unprepared to build upon mass communications research. Conversely, although the journalists and campaign strategists writing instantaneous histories are much more aware of the dynamics by the

⁸ Ibid.

very nature of their respective professions, consideration for their audience likely compromises their willingness to draw upon this body of literature. To use an analogy, writing these popular histories is comparable to a chef in a restaurant preparing a meal. Although the chef could probably fully expound on the theory and method of creating haute cuisine, he or she knows the diner is more concerned with the taste and presentation of the final product. It falls to the connoisseur – read academic historian – to appreciate the finer details and offer constructive criticism.

Keeping this in mind, although a political historian can learn a great deal about how these campaign participants viewed an element such as the television medium *during* a particular campaign, he or she must be willing to use all necessary means to discover the *why* behind the *what*. For example, when Liberal strategist Michael Kirby notes that the perception and performance of Turner was an important consideration in the minds of strategists for the party's ultimate success, it is a perfect opportunity to draw upon the work of other disciplines. Kirby writes, "People vote on the basis of their perception of the values on which a leader and a party will base decisions on future problems. The *perception* [emphasis added] of those values is far more important than a party's or leader's stated position on a given issue."⁹ Rather than accepting a strategist's wisdom as gospel, a thorough academic historical analysis will therefore search for the literature behind the theory of perception, determine whether political science has compiled data that supports the theory in the context of this campaign, and conduct a critical reading of primary sources to discover how participants exploited this component of successful electioneering. These steps, combined with an appreciation for historical changes in campaign dynamics, ought to produce the type of new political history for

⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

which English so eloquently petitioned.

Numerous other books written by political insiders around this time provide academic historians with similarly insightful anecdotes and commentaries about election campaigns. A reviewer with an eye to detail will also notice a recognition of the increasing importance of the televised media in these works. Whereas early histories would mention the role of television mostly as an aside, these newer volumes devoted more time and space to revealing its growing stature among strategists.

One excellent example of this new attention to television comes in John Lashinger and Geoffrey Stevens's informative 1992 study Leaders & Lesser Mortals: Backroom Politics in Canada. The authors, a long-time Tory strategist and journalist respectively, explain that "backroom politicians both value and fear television. TV is relentless. It sees through phoniness and magnifies discomfort. A politician can run from newspapers; he can avoid in-person encounters with the public; but he cannot hide his emotions, his hesitancy and insecurity, from the television camera."¹⁰

Although the book is constructed thematically and the 1988 federal election is but one political campaign that is touched upon, there are some revealing insights that are useful for this thesis' purposes. For instance, Gabor Apor, a television consultant who helped Liberal leader John Turner prepare for the televised debates, gave the authors an indication of his personal views on image construction in what he saw as the post-literate¹¹ age. Apor contended that a politician can't create a television image by trying to

¹⁰ John Lashinger and Geoffrey Stevens, *Leaders and Lesser Mortals: Backroom Politics in Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1992), p. 9.

¹¹ A post-literate society, as used by Robert Mason Lee and Gabor Apor, is defined as a population that actively interacts with various media and technology. In *Who Are The Post Literate*, Selin Yaman, Misha Schubert, Robb Hittner and Nick McMicking of the Department of Communications at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, write that post-literates have "acquired their literacy by interacting with our heavily signed postmodern world," and they are "multi-literate; they can read a wide variety of texts."

be something today he was not yesterday.¹² “An image is like a diet. It lasts only as long as you’re willing to stick to the rules,”¹³ Apor was quoted as saying. “Just as 99 per cent of diets fail, 99 per cent of image changes fail simply because if you try to assign characteristics to an individual that are untrue or unfamiliar or phony, it is unlikely that he or she will be very comfortable sticking to the rules twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”¹⁴ This comment might serve to explain Turner’s occasional success with the medium and also his long-standing troubles in adapting to a political world held captive by the television camera. Thus, although Lashinger and Stevens have seemingly written a strategic handbook for prospective politicians, an astute historian can utilize the information gleaned from their interviews to further illuminate how campaign strategists use the media to their advantage and how they must contend with its unpredictable nature.

A final notable recent example of a campaign strategist-turned author who provides a historical account of the 1988 election comes by way of the popular book Fights of Our Lives. Written by John Duffy, a long-time Liberal strategist and political consultant, and published in 2002, the book reviews every federal election campaign from the time of Confederation to the great free trade debate of 1988, and even includes an epilogue on the three subsequent elections fought between 1988 and the time of publication. Somewhat comparable to J. Murray Beck’s earlier review of campaigns, Duffy takes a decidedly lighter approach to presenting a history of elections, and he

Moreover, “post-literacy does not render traditional literacies obsolete, rather it begins to bridge the gap between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures.” Selin Yaman and others, *Who Are The Post Literate*, (Melbourne: Department of Communications at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, June, 1997), accessed from http://communication.students.rmit.edu.au/projects/postliteracy/html_pages/otherwise1.html, Internet.

¹² Television can also act as a corrective on new images. Old footage is often used to demonstrate how a new stance differs from an old one.

¹³ Lashinger and Stevens, p. 8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

comes to his task with different life experience and training.

Choosing to highlight several campaigns he deemed to be exceptional in Canada's development or turning points in the nation's history, Duffy brings the reader behind the scenes and exposes the jockeying, strategizing and figurative brawls between partisans from the point of view of strategists who aimed to get their candidate or party elected. He contends: "Historians tend to describe how elections illuminate certain key historical themes. In our terms, elections are about deploying major policies or themes and key leadership qualities to build a coalition of often-disparate supporters."¹⁵ Thus, in writing his popular history, Duffy continues in the tradition of other non-academic writers in promoting story over theory. As he notes in his introduction, his goal is not to look for themes, but rather to tell the stories of political actors and their strategies in a fun and engaging manner. This is especially clear in the analogies Duffy uses. He compares the strategy presented to party leaders from their election headquarters to instructions a coach gives to his/her football team before they attempt to make a crucial play.

Duffy also makes several allusions to the impact of the new media. For example, in his introduction to "Mano a Mano," a chapter devoted to the 1988 campaign, he begins with a description of the television studio where the leaders are about to debate. Duffy considered the debates one of two turning points in the campaign – the other being the Conservative advertising strategy – and explains that "by bringing the leaders directly before the voters as never before, the whiz bang new technologies of politics have reduced the vast intricate machinery of a national election campaign to the most ancient political transaction, the one-to-one handshake."¹⁶ To Duffy, the technological advances

¹⁵ John Duffy, *Fights Of Our Lives*, (Toronto: Harper-Collins Publishers Ltd., 2002), p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

of the mass media had brought democratic politics almost full circle. Much like the ancient Athenian gatherings in coliseums to discuss and solve political problems of the day, the new electronic age was “a long way from the nineteenth-century campaigns with their strawberry socials and mandements read from the church pulpit.”¹⁷ As he so emphatically put it: “This is democracy en direct, served up live and raw – the way you, the voter, want it! No elites! No backroom compacts! Just big leaders and big issues – and the choice is yours!!”¹⁸

Duffy largely avoids sifting through archives and relies heavily on secondary sources. While he appreciates electronic sources, apparent in the number of quotations he uses, he does not list them in his bibliography nor are they systematically and empirically tested. He did make an impressive effort to put the campaigns into some sort of broad historical context, however. His *modus operandi* – to explore each past federal election and focus on five of the most consequential – permitted Duffy to make some comparative observations as he tackled more recent events. Although his current employ and partisan background gave him access to important characters in the 1988 campaign, his means of conveying his stories and his purpose understandably precluded wading deeper into theory.

Character Appraisals: The Biographers

Well-written biographies of political figures also provide these types of revelations and all three major party leaders received this treatment in the months immediately preceding or following the election. The campaign biography, as a genre, was sculpted to the tenor of the times. Although political biography has long been a

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

staple of historical writing, most prime ministers, presidents or other leaders were immortalized in this form after they had died or long after their retirement. The biographies on Mulroney, Turner and Broadbent published at this time were contemporary character examinations in addition to studies of their familial and political past. In an age when television coverage necessitated leadership-oriented campaigns and when a segment of the electorate cast their ballot based on the person at the party's head, these biographies gave the public another avenue through which to get to know the men who would be prime minister.

As would be expected, once again journalists tended to be at the helm. In the case of this type of contemporary historical writing, the authors' training no doubt lends itself handily to their task. To elaborate, one of the interesting outcomes of the shift from letters and journal entries to the new media is that historians often have much less recorded evidence on which to base their narratives. The interviews conducted for these books, sometimes during the course of regular journalistic duties, are often the only evidence left to posterity. Long after telephone conversations have been forgotten, faxes lost, and emails deleted with the click of a mouse, this first journalistic draft of history will remain accessible.

For Liberal leader John Turner, an unauthorized biography written by journalist Greg Weston entitled Reign of Error gave Canadians a revealing look into the politician's troubled position within his party. Some political commentators actually point to its release, in the months before the start of the campaign, as one reason why the party's popularity declined in advance of the election. The book itself must be looked at with some suspicion by academics. It contains no formal citations and, due to the nature of

unauthorized biographies, it's easy to dismiss some statements as hearsay and conclude that some sources have ulterior motives. Yet the book also strips away the mediated image of a political actor – the persona presented to the electorate through media events – and examines the demons he must face. Historians studying the tense, yet symbiotic relationship between politicians and the media will find ample evidence of ongoing attempts by campaign strategists to master the image-making power of television.

Weston's study of Turner recalls numerous instances of his trouble adapting to the world of television. The author recreates the leader's disastrous 1984 campaign, including his lackluster performance in the debates, which many political pundits cite as a major aggravating factor in his demise.¹⁹ He also examines instances when Turner's out-dated political sensibilities proved detrimental to his image. For example, the Liberal leader had a penchant for patting the posteriors of women while on the campaign trail. Weston reports that Turner didn't believe reporters would put footage of this behaviour on television despite warnings from his advisors. When it did appear on newscasts it became a major story and potentially alienated a segment of the electorate.²⁰ In essence, political style was no longer an "old boys' club" affair – a leader's style was now universally observed and had to be cast in a way that was accepted across a much wider spectrum.

Weston also provides some rich anecdotes about the leader's refusal to use negative advertising during the campaign and his struggles to craft an effective message while Leader of the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. For example, Weston reveals the type of strategy the Liberal caucus would pitch to Turner in an effort to get

¹⁹ Greg Weston, *Reign of Error: The Inside Story of John Turner's Troubled Leadership*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1988), p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

attention on the evening news during the free trade debates. On one occasion, the caucus staged a skit in the House of Commons where Turner would announce if elected he wouldn't abide by the agreement. Caucus members would then jump up and start shouting "tear it up" while ripping sheets of paper.²¹ Weston writes that "it all made for a great ten-second clip on the evening news: millions of half-comatose television viewers see John Turner protecting the little guy against those terrible Tories who must be terrible because John Turner was obviously pretty steamed about whatever those Tories had done."²²

But the author also suggests Turner was not excited about these theatrics; he called it 'bull theatre' where image matters more than substance.²³ Weston cites Turner's former press aide as saying one of leader's biggest inhibitions was performing for television crews. The aide noted that while "he understood what he had to do for the cameras; television just never fit his personality.... He must have said that a thousand times: 'I'm not a goddam actor.' If someone asks him what he thinks about something, he doesn't want to think how he can say it in thirty seconds or less."²⁴ Turner clearly conceived of political discourse in pre-television terms. Politicians worked out the logic of an issue in long, drawn-out dialogues reminiscent of Arthur Meighen taking on William Lyon Mackenzie. Television did not sustain such dialogue.

Nevertheless, Weston notes that "improving his TV image has been one of his more enduring preoccupations in public office."²⁵ It was during his decade in political

²¹ *House of Commons Debates: Official Report*, Second Session – Thirty-Third Parliament, VIII, (22 September – 26 October, 1987), p. 10359.

²² Weston, p. 144.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

exile on Bay Street that Turner missed out on significant parts of the electronic revolution. These included the growing use of satellite feeds, the introduction of television cameras to the House of Commons, and the less friendly relations between the press corps and politicians as newer journalists tended to avoid personal relationships that could be seen as influencing their reporting. In essence, politics had become part of the “instant” world.

In and of itself, Weston’s biography simply sheds some light on the relative strengths and weaknesses of Turner’s political instincts and reveals his slowness to master the dynamics of a modern campaign. However, an academic historian seeking to write a more detailed history of the television media’s role in the 1988 campaign might contextualize the book’s relevant passages on the media in the ever-evolving historical development of campaigns. As mentioned previously in discussions on the media’s involvement in the first two federal elections fought over proposed reciprocity agreements, Canada’s news media initially tended to organize itself along fairly partisan lines. It was relatively easy for readers to discern that the *Toronto Globe* supported the Grits while the *Toronto Mail and Empire* was sympathetic to the Tories.²⁶

The newspaper business, it must always be remembered, is an industry comprised of enterprises engaged in the pursuit of profit. As Minko Sotiron explained in his 1997 book From Politics to Profit: The Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890-1920, a thirst for profit much earlier in the century dictated changes in reporting styles. He states that while “the nineteenth century had a long tradition of aspiring politicians, from George Brown to Wilfrid Laurier, who used the editorial page to gain

²⁶ See R. Louis Gentilcore, ed. *The Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. II.*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Plate 51.

entry into Parliament and acquire political influence,”²⁷ the new century’s growing urban centres, increasing literacy rates, and exploding consumer demand in boom times resulted in a decline of partisan loyalties and a burgeoning corporate sensibility. “There was money to be made in a successful newspaper,” writes Sotiron, “and profit became the guiding principle. Competition intensified, for winning elections was now less important than gaining advertising revenues by pleasing audiences.”²⁸ Therefore, as newspapers began to appeal to the public at large, with general interest items and more balanced political reporting, they maximized profit. Sir Hugh Graham’s *Montreal Star*, founded in 1869, led the way, followed by the *Toronto Star* in 1892 as paid advertising and mass circulation displaced the nineteenth century partisan products. With the birth of radio and television, both types of media that occupied public airwaves, the modern journalistic ideals of fairness in reporting were further reinforced.

By the time of the Mackenzie King government and the St. Laurent era, the rabid editorialists of the early days had largely been replaced by professional journalists who operated in a “responsible and civilized”²⁹ manner, according to University of Calgary historian Patrick H. Brennan’s *Press-Government Relations during the Liberal Years, 1935-1957*. Columnists like Grant Dexter and Grattan O’Leary enjoyed an inside partisan track in their reporting, but their output – opinions – were now largely confined to columns, not the front page. During Turner’s formative years in government, these relationships became collegial. The Parliament Hill press gallery was still a relatively

²⁷ Minko Sotiron, *From Politics to Profits: The Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890-1920*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), p. 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ Patrick H. Brennan, *Reporting The Nation’s Business: Press-Government Relations during the Liberal Years, 1935-1957*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. ix. See also: Norman Hillmer’s edited collection *Pearson: The Unlikely Gladiator* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999).

small collective that consisted of seasoned reporters. Only with the introduction of cameras to the House of Commons, an expanded national media contingent, and a generational turnover did the atmosphere begin to change. As Weston notes, Turner was on his Bay Street sabbatical as this change occurred and probably misjudged its implications. In any event, the information contained in Weston's book coupled with an appreciation for the historical relationship between the media and politicians permits academic historians to form a clearer picture of the obstacles Turner had to overcome in the free trade debate. Thus, although contemporary biographies written by journalists often lack the finer points of the historical method, they *can* provide a strong characterization of the personalities involved in a campaign, an appraisal of their strengths and weakness, and an implicit indication of the relative importance of certain new ingredients in modern politics such as the television media.

Further examples of this utility are also evident in biographies of Mulroney and Broadbent. In the case of Michel Gratton's 1990 monograph, Still the Boss: A Candid Look at Brian Mulroney, and the later editions of Judy Steed's Ed Broadbent: The Pursuit of Power, the authors enjoyed a privilege Weston did not – the luxury of reflecting upon the 1988 election to further explicate their subject's character traits. In deference to the fact that some of the information on the contest will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters, this historiographical review will confine itself to general observations on the merits of each book and potential for an alternative approach and additional research. First, like Weston, both Gratton and Steed bring a journalist's flare for a tightly written, straight-forward and engaging story. Moreover, as a former political columnist who joined the Prime Minister's Office under Brian Mulroney before returning

to the press gallery, Gratton is privy to a unique perspective that an academic historian would be remiss to ignore. Although the author can hardly be considered objective, his experience on both sides of the politics-media divide means his insight into the mating ritual between the image-makers and the image-purveyors is especially valuable.

What is noticeably lacking in these books is a trained historian's methodical vision and methodological approach. Although these biographies, like other types of contemporary histories, use interviews to great effect, their examination of primary source material lacks an identifiable pattern and defensible reasoning. As is often the case with journalistic writing, and in contrast to scholarly works, the narrative supercedes method and theory. For instance, although both Gratton and Steed employ extensive oral histories in their books in the form of interviews, they do not expressly state how they intend to verify or validate these sources' arguments and opinions. Certain rhetorical devices are sometimes present, and the authors provide illustrations and examples of notions put forward, but a deeper examination of the political forces at work is most often missing. It is all very much the "first rough draft of history." Additionally, analysis of television footage, which all authors agree plays such an essential role in modern political life, lacks an orderly appraisal. Although each author obviously relied on televised images in forming their interpretation, there is little explicit evidence to suggest it was viewed with a critical eye. Television here provides the authors with a quick confirming image, but never evidence of broad, systematic patterns. The absence could be the result of the time constraints and methodological limitations inherent with histories-on-the-run. Many of the observations contained in contemporary biography, like instant electoral histories, are recorded as events play out in real time. Subsequent

investigations in electronic archives can be subject to unforeseen delays and the time-intensive research required to review a campaign's worth of footage is not conducive to a working journalist's schedule, especially if a publication date is soon after an event. Instead, these authors rely on their own memories, the recollections of others and notes jotted down at the time. For them, the televised record is ephemeral – convenient when it comes to mind but not worthy of serious consideration. Therefore, although these works do an admirable job of giving an immediate account of the recent past, the enterprising post-election historian will sense that a more extensive review is in order.

Rich In Theory, But Lacking Historical Perspective: The Political Scientists

As evidenced by the review of the writings of journalists, campaign insiders and biographers of the key participants in the 1988 election campaign, there is certainly no shortage of narratives about these definitive events on the hustings. A consistent criticism from this thesis' perspective is the lack of explicit theoretical concepts found and developed in these works. The primary goals of these authors understandably appear to be to tell a story, to share popularly gleaned political wisdom or to illuminate the personalities of the people involved. The 20th century, however, gave birth to the science of "political science" – a discipline rooted in the belief that there must be objective rhyme and reason to political events. How, then, do political scientists explain the campaign and write about it? The answers are many and largely depend on which area of the campaign is considered. The propensity of these scholars to deconstruct this type of event into much smaller observable units is a defining characteristic of the discipline. Political science has broken into a number of streams, ranging from conflict analysis to individual case psephology – the study of elections. In fact, a survey of political science writing on

the election finds a vastly larger quantity of journal articles on specific elements of the campaign than volumes encompassing the whole. A notable exception comes in the form of Alan Frizzell, Jon Pammett and Anthony Westell's The Canadian General Election of 1988, which in itself is a compilation of independent essays.

The editors of the study aimed to create a "concise, readable and analytical account of the election, blending journalism and social science."³⁰ They have arguably succeeded in their enterprise. The Canadian General Election of 1988 deftly uses theoretical concepts, the nomenclature and method from the social sciences as a means to explain many of the twists and turns during the campaign. In this respect, the practical descriptions and narrative delineations found in the instant histories take on new meaning and obtain a scholarly pedigree. For instance, in discussing the various stages and strategies for the 1988 debates, Robert Krause wades into pools of relevant terminology. He describes the pre-debate stage as "metadebating... a psychological game played by candidates and their surrogates through the media to influence the public."³¹ In aforementioned accounts of the election by journalists, political insiders and biographers, evidence of this concept is present, but an analytical discussion that clearly identifies it and refers to the body of evidence that supports it is absent. Similarly, although narrative accounts refer to polling numbers in the course of their story arc, they feed the numbers to their readers without first reading the label, including warnings about potential side effects. As any political scientist will note, polling is a science that requires careful consideration of method and bias. Frizzell's chapter on "The Perils of Polling," therefore, includes a thorough description of how public opinion is measured, the influence a

³⁰ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), p. vii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

survey's question order can have on results, and the spotty record some pollsters have of prediction-making after reading their own results. Such a passage would be out-of-place in a popular history, but necessary in a serious scholarly study. Indeed, by the end of the century, such quantification of polling outcomes is deemed necessary by all media outlets. In short, while narrative authors wrote the story of the election, the political scientists read between the lines.

The Need For A Hybrid History

With this more penetrating perspective in mind, it's worthwhile to ask whether there is need for a scholarly political historian to put his or her stamp on this campaign. In and of itself, does the non-narrative approach in The Canadian General Election of 1988 leave such a gaping whole in the historiography that a new academic treatment is warranted? The short answer is probably not. As enthralling as that style of historical writing can be for an audience, the quality of academic research in this study and numerous other political science journal articles sufficiently explains how public opinion was gauged and manipulated during this campaign, the steps strategists took to exploit it and how the mass media, knowingly or unknowingly, assisted in the process. Should a person long for a traditional narrative, books like Fraser's Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, though rather hurriedly written, provide excellent accounts of the campaign from start to finish. These companion pieces from the fields of political science and journalism will give a reader a thorough background on the election. Other works, including ones written by campaign insiders or biographers, offer peripheral insights into strategy or character. The authors of these various monographs focus their critical eye on a campaign that lasted only seven weeks. Broader historical considerations

are still, however, generally missing. By adhering to the demands of the here and now, contemporary writers – journalists and political scientists – have often tended to neglect the wider historical context. Contemporary writers can hardly be blamed for mostly disregarding the long view when theirs is by nature a presentist trade. Some of Canada's historians, on the other hand, have kept their blinkers on, have refused to heed John English's admonition and consequently have had little to say about elections from the recent past.

This is not to say that all accounts of the 1988 campaign ignore all that came before them. For example, in the introductory chapter of The Canadian General Election of 1988, entitled "Setting the Stage," Westell takes a cursory look at the Progressive Conservative government's first mandate in an attempt to guide the reader down the path towards the 1988 election.³² On occasion, the writer ventures even farther afield. For example, when writing about the government's troubles during the first few years of its mandate, he suggests much of the blame can be laid at the feet of inexperience. Westell notes the brief Clark government of 1979-1980 was the only time in the previous 21 years the party had exercised authority and driven the bureaucracy.³³ Elsewhere, Westell, and other contributors sometimes refer back to campaigns from 1957 to the 1970s to highlight changing political strategies and techniques; however, historical analysis is still fairly sparse, and most often footnotes simply invite the reader to explore suggested readings for additional information rather than reveal a re-reading of the archives. Most important, the authors' reliance on existing literature from their own discipline appears to have hindered any plans to cast a wider net. It seems more than coincidental that the

³² Ibid, p. 1.

³³ Ibid.

earliest historical elements they employ begin during the same era as Meisel's early work.³⁴ Thus while the writers are not quite present-minded to a fault, the door for political historians has been left ajar.³⁵

Furthermore, the election has not been fully appreciated as an historical event in itself. A necessary trade-off when writing instant histories, published so soon after the fact, is their unavoidable adherence to a definitive and abrupt end. There can be no appreciation of what has come afterwards – of whether an event is only the latest part of a continuing trend, a plateau, or the high watermark of progress before a decline. To put the question more bluntly with respect to the media and elections: what happened next? The prominent role of electronic broadcasting in this campaign, and particularly the prestige of the television camera, is undisputed by these authors. They may differ in their conclusions about the degree of impact, but they do not dare to dismiss it entirely. But they seldom acknowledge its seismic impact in the long run of Canadian history. From a historian's point of view, this is the defining characteristic of 1988. Although a history of the media in subsequent elections is still some way off, a survey of its general direction would bring new insight into its place in the scheme of 1988.

There is a copious existing literature on this watershed. Quite rightly, the election is considered to be "one of the most dramatic in Canadian history."³⁶ However, when it becomes evident that pieces of the puzzle are still missing, it is incumbent upon emerging scholars – particularly our historians, our national chroniclers – to work to complete it.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

³⁵ One notes with interest as an aside that Canadian journalist Jeffrey Simpson did rise to the challenge of combining past and present in analyzing the Mulroney years. Simpson's 1988 book *Spoils of Power* is a masterpiece of present problems – patronage and its abuse – in historical context. Jeffrey Simpson, *Spoils of Power: The Politics of Patronage*, (Toronto: Collins, 1988).

³⁶ Frizzell and others, p. 131.

This research will specifically endeavour to analyze the mass media in the 1988 federal campaign by using concepts and theories drawn from the social sciences and drawing them into the historian's tool kit. By doing this, it should be possible to construct a new hybrid telling of the election of 1988 – a combination of a historian's perspective with the intensive presentism of journalists and political scientists. It will contend the volatility of public opinion was indicative of the extent to which the electorate relied on ever-changing media cues. The prowess of electoral players in appreciating, managing and exploiting the power of the televised medium will also be shown to be a substantial factor in the relative success or failure of their overall performance. In the end, it will strive to demonstrate that the 1988 campaign should be viewed as a watershed moment in the medium's influence on political activities.

Chapter Three - Getting inside the mind of a voter during the electronic age: How mass communications research can assist a historian in reading the parties, media and electorate

When John English made his plea for historians to return to writing political history, he almost certainly did not mean they should fall completely back on the days when rhetorical narratives ruled the roost. Rather, his call should be looked as a chance to update that model by drawing upon all the knowledge social scientists have accumulated. At base, it means new political historians should utilize some of the information that can be gleaned from the existing political studies. A more ambitious enterprise would be to co-opt some of the tools these researchers use when conducting their own analysis and employ them with a historian's sense of long-term dynamics and change. Look, for instance, at the advances made by American political historians like Robert Allan Caro and Doris Kearns Goodwin whose studies of the American presidency are both immensely readable and fully invested with new political skills and perspectives.¹

To achieve this goal a particular course of action is required. First, owing to a traditional historian's relative unfamiliarity with some social science concepts, it is necessary to lay out these tools and carefully examine each one. Before beginning to use them, a thorough reading of an instruction manual is necessary. In this case, a review of some of the existing literature is once again in order. Here, we can put a finger on the pulse of prevailing schools of thought and choose which elements best serve our purpose. Once the tools are polished and operational, the next step is to draw up a blue print for how they will be put into use in the case of the 1988 election. What are the raw materials available for the project? Are there any missing components that could diminish the

¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, (Norwalk, Conn.: Easton Press, 1987).

utility of the final product? Finally, what are the expected benefits of the project? How will these tools help Canadian political historians to revitalize their trade? Will it result in a functional piece of work that might serve a greater purpose? Future researchers can be relied on to evaluate the answer to the last question posed, but expository elements of the proposal can be managed expeditiously.

Although the subject matter of political scientists is probably most familiar to political historians, some of the concepts and theories they have developed to analyze these events are more elusive. Furthermore, the tendency of social scientists to borrow freely from other fields within the discipline leads a historian who is studying the influence of television on the 1988 election to other destinations long outside of the historian's purview. To best understand the medium and its effect on the message, one must first look to its specialists: mass communication experts. These researchers have a storied history in their own right, and a brief review of the advancement of thought in the field is a prerequisite to any media study.

A Historiographical Review Of Mass Media Literature And Explanation Of Key Ideas

If Innis was the grandfather of Canadian economic history, his counterpart in mass communications is surely the American journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann. The founder of many theories now tested in mass communication studies, he first argued in 1922 that when a person reads a newspaper (s)he develops a mental picture based in part on past experience brought to the reading and in part on the way in which information is presented. Expanding upon this cognitive duality Lippmann developed ideas about stereotyping and persuasion.

The act of persuasion is "intended [to] change opinion, belief, value or attitude in

one person or group.”² At times persuasion by mass media is unintentional. For example, O’Sullivan et al, in Key Concepts in Communication note a 1976 study by Gerbner and Gross revealed that “television viewing can exaggerate anticipation and fear of criminal action by others beyond any reasonable, statistically based estimates.”³ More often, however, the attempt to persuade is deliberate, particularly by advertisers or political leaders. Lippmann’s ground-breaking 1922 book Public Opinion foretold of a coming age when mass persuasion would be a powerful tool in manufacturing consent.⁴ He noted that “as a result of psychological research, coupled with modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power.”⁵

Prophesizing that “the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise,”⁶ he further speculated that when politicians harness the full potential of persuasion, they could use the mass media to manipulate perception and stereotypes. By controlling the general message, they could shape preconceived notions and influence reaction. It is worth noting that Lippmann’s ideas were formed in the years of the Depression and war, when the need to engineer society’s beliefs – for both good and evil ends – was at a premium. Both Roosevelt and Hitler were, for instance, masters of persuasion, albeit for entirely different purposes. “For the most part we do not see first and then define, we define first and then see,” Lippmann noted. “In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick

² Tim O’Sullivan and others, *Key Concepts in Communication*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 170.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This was a phrase later picked up by Noam Chomsky to great effect in his writing.

⁵ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), p. 248.

⁶ Ibid.

out what our culture has already defined for us, and we perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.”⁷ Though still in their infancy, Lippmann’s suggestions influenced much of the work done in mass media studies in subsequent decades. His arguments would become the foundation for the theoretical concepts of agenda-setting, framing and priming – familiar tools to practitioners of mass communications by the 1980s.

Not What To Think, But What To Think About

Agenda-setting is “a term used to describe the ways in which the media wittingly or unwittingly structure public debate and awareness.”⁸ The distinction between intentional and unintentional presentations is extremely important because it reveals the utility of agenda-setting for both the news-makers and news gatherers. The concept “refers to the way the media, particularly news, current affairs and documentary output, have the power to focus public attention on a defined and limited set of selected issues, while ignoring others.”⁹

The two main components of the agenda-setting process are: what subjects are *covered* and how they are *presented* to an audience. As O’Sullivan et al. explain in their 1983 book, Key Concepts in Communication, “this refers to the dynamics of coverage; for example what spectrum of viewpoints, symbols, questions and so on are selected to construct a particular news item or documentary programme, and crucially, how they are ranked, or accorded legitimacy and priority. The consequences of this process lie in the ways that the agenda is internalized by the audience, and this relates to the general issue of the role of the media in defining social reality, and their role as agencies of ideological

⁷ Ibid., p. 81.

⁸ O’Sullivan and others, p. 6.

⁹ Ibid.

transmission.”¹⁰

Arguably, the broadcasters or publishers have the stronger hand at this table; they have ultimate decision-making power as to what appears in their product and how a story is presented. However, the mass media is generally expected to provide a public service and exercise its role in a democratic fashion. Therefore, major political events in which the audience has a stake, such as election campaigns, virtually always receive substantial coverage because the public brings a preconceived sense of interest to them. But while the type of coverage remains mostly in the hands of journalists, the politicians and campaign organizers aim to ensure their message is reported in a positive manner and that they receive as much air time or column space as possible. In essence, the players attempt to influence the way the referees call the game.

For campaign teams, mastering the power of the concept is akin to finding the Holy Grail. Numerous journal articles based on laboratory experiments and case studies have publicized the media's remarkable power to set a public agenda. In the early 1970s Maxwell McCombs and David Weaver conducted one of the first experiments to determine whether the issues to which a person was exposed by the media influenced what (s)he considered to be the important issues of the day. In their original journal article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* the authors suggested that the media have an agenda-setting function. In Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory, a book of essays published on the 25th anniversary of that original article, the researchers set out to examine the latest scholarly work on the subject.

The collection's articles examine political advertising agendas and their impact on behaviour, the framing of agendas, methodological advances on cause and effect roles in

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

agenda-setting, and the application of agenda-setting.¹¹ In the editors' opinion:

"Understanding the dynamics of agenda-setting is central to understanding the dynamics of contemporary democracy."¹² At the time of this book's publication in 1997, the editors indicated that more than 200 articles had woven agenda-setting into their research.¹³ These articles have not all focused on the political implications of such a concept, but those which did have mostly substantiated the authors' theory. Conversely, those which have come to different conclusions were sometimes criticized for applying a faulty methodology. A review of articles of particular interest to political historians studying elections reveals several frequently cited studies that have made valuable contributions to the discourse. Many, for instance, showed the ability of advertisers to set consumers' agendas: to program them to reach for the product that they had been programmed to believe was the best.

Additionally, the concept of agenda-setting is explored in a widely-referenced study by political scientists Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder. In 1987's News That Matters: Television and American Opinion, the researchers report on a series of experiments designed to test the theories. Audiences were subjected to a process whereby they watched real television newscasts with one additional story spliced into the middle for varying periods of time. When, at the end of the exposure, subjects were asked to prioritize the most important issues affecting the country, they tended to give higher ranks to issues covered most often in the newscasts, especially if the issue was featured in multiple newscasts. Follow-up interviews a week later revealed persistent evidence of the

¹¹ Maxwell McCombs and others, eds., *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1997), p. x.

¹² Ibid., p. xiii.

¹³ Ibid., p. 3.

heightened salience and importance of the issue used as a variable.

In his review of Iyengar and Kinder's study, published in the January/February 1988 edition of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Michael Schudson poked some holes in the manner in which the authors carried out their experiment, including the questionable realness of the laboratory set-up and the medium's relative influence compared to other news sources. He concludes "the experiments... encouraged subjects to try as hard as possible to show that they had learned from TV and measured that learning with a hypersensitive instrument that picked up trivial bits of learning."¹⁴ Nevertheless, Schudson acknowledges that "it may be, however – and the importance of this book depends on it – that just such cognitive flotsam and jetsam decisively influence elections."¹⁵ Although Schudson's critique is indicative of the rigorous debate surrounding the soundness of procedural techniques, whatever the individual faults of such experiments, on balance, the secondary literature heavily supports the concept's existence and practical application.

Message Organization, Metaphor And Guidance

One specific way of setting an agenda is to frame the issues and debate-making news. **Framing**, which pertains to the "organization of social knowledge and experience," permits a person to understand and relate to a stimulus.¹⁶ Thus, framing is a process by which an issue is set in a context of other issues with the result that the recipient will tend to "hyperlink" to those issues when the initial issue is raised. As Key Concepts in Communication explains, "the term has also been employed in the study of

¹⁴ Michael Schudson. Review: "News That Matters: Television and American Opinion," *The Columbia Journalism Review*, (January/February 1988), available from <http://pcl.stanford.edu/common/docs/research/iyengar/1988/reviews/cjr-newssthatmatters.html>, Internet.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ O'Sullivan and others, p. 92.

the mass media. Media frames are principles of selection – codes of emphasis, interpretation and presentation. Media producers routinely use them to organize media output and discourses, whether verbal or visual. In this context media frames allow journalists, for example, to process and ‘package’ large amounts of diverse and often contradictory information, quickly and routinely. These frames are therefore an important institutionalized part of encoding of mass media texts, and may play a key role in structuring audience decodings.”¹⁷

In their 1997 article “Issue Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion,” Thomas E. Nelson and Zoe M. Oxley point to the work of Iyengar and Kinder and McCombs and Shaw as an important influence in hastening the shift from “the prevailing cognitive model of communication and persuasion effects [that] holds that messages affect opinion by influencing beliefs about the qualities and characteristics of the attitude object... [to] the subtler ways that communication can influence attitudes without altering the content of one’s belief about the attitude object.”¹⁸ In other words, the shift reflects the modernization of mass communications research and reveals how the traditional concept of outright persuasion has been replaced by intricate studies of the human psyche’s subconscious response to the manner in which particular information is presented.

One such example of the subtlety of this concept can be found in American political scientist C. Anthony Broh’s 1980 article “Horse-Race Journalism: Reporting the Polls in the 1976 Presidential Election.” **Horse race journalism**, a colloquial expression for a type of agenda-setting, refers to the tendency of some news media outlets to frame

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Thomas E. Nelson and Zoe M. Oxley, “Issue Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion,” *The Journal of Politics*, 61, no. 4, (1997), p. 1040-1041.

political campaigns as a sporting event. Using sporting or competitive metaphors, journalists sometimes characterize elections “as ‘horse races,’ [report that] candidates [are] ‘coming from behind,’ [and] races [are] ‘going down to the wire.’ Party politics is described as a ‘team sport.’ Politicians get ‘outflanked,’ elections are ‘pitched battles,’ [and] political enemies ‘sling the mud.’”¹⁹ According to framing theory, “how a metaphor is deployed to organize and make intelligible otherwise inchoate political information is central to [its] purpose.”²⁰ It also, of course, indicates the subversive potential of these tools – the framing may, in fact, not reflect the real consequences of the issue, simply the way in which the originator wishes them to be perceived. Broh notes that by characterizing the political event as a contest or competition instead of a discussion and debate of ideas and policies, party leaders take on increased importance and attention.²¹ Thus, Broh’s evidence supporting framing theory, in addition to other studies, gives historians studying media effects in elections another instrument by which to gauge their influence.

Iyengar and Kinder’s study also found evidence of something they termed ‘**priming**,’ another integral to agenda-setting. As Schudson explains, “when news ‘primes,’ it influences the criteria by which people make political judgments.”²² An experiment reported on by the authors of News That Matters: Television and American Opinion revealed that “news stories that stressed the president's responsibility for a specific problem led viewers to attach more importance to the president's handling of that

¹⁹ Thomas M.J. Bateman, Review: “Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good by Cappella, Joseph N. and Kathleen Hall Jamieson,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), available from http://teachpol.tcnj.edu/book_reviews/1998/Bateman_T_2_99.html, Internet.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Anthony C. Broh, “Horse-Race Journalism: Reporting the Polls in the 1976 Presidential Election,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 44, no. 4, (1980), p. 527.

²² Schudson, available from <http://pcl.stanford.edu/common/docs/research/iyengar/1988/reviews/cjr-newssthatmatters.html>, Internet.

problem in their overall judgments about presidential competence.”²³ U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s downfall in 1980, for example, was in large part due to the Republicans’ ability to present him as a president who had been disconnected from America’s overall security and greatness. In this way, through the media, the public was primed to consider him an ineffectual leader. Other researchers quickly tested the concept of priming for their own purposes. Jon A. Krosnick and Donald R. Kinder use the theory to explain shifts in U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s approval rating following the Iran Contra scandal, for example.²⁴ Priming effects have also been studied in Joanne M. Miller and Krosnick’s “News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgeable Citizens Are Guided by a Trusted Source,” and Roy L. Behr and Shanto Iyengar’s “Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda.” Perhaps most relevant to this research is Queen’s University mass communications professor Matthew Mendelsohn’s instructive 1996 article “The Media and Interpersonal Communication: The Priming of Issues, Leaders, and Party Identification.” He endorses the idea that “part of the reason for vote instability during election campaigns is the media’s role in priming the character of leaders.”²⁵ Using Iyengar and Kinder’s research as a template, Mendelsohn suggests that media priming in the 1988 federal election, and specifically the leader’s debate, resulted in some of the shifts found in polling data.²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jon A. Krosnick and Donald R. Kinder, “Altering the Foundations of Support For the President Through Priming,” *The American Political Science Review*, 84, no. 2, (1990), p. 497.

²⁵ Matthew Mendelsohn, “The Media and Interpersonal Communications: The Priming of Issues, Leaders, and Party Identification,” *The Journal of Politics*, 58, no. 4, (February 1996), p. 112.

²⁶ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Mass Media Concepts In Practice

Mendelsohn's work is one of the most significant Canadian studies to utilize mass communication concepts to study a televised election debate; elsewhere, scholarship has also tuned into the events to use the theory in a practical application. Since the first, live televised presidential debate in America in 1960, one which many commentators surmise provided the telegenic John F. Kennedy the boost he needed to defeat a tired-looking Richard Nixon, historians, political scientists and mass communications researchers have all sought to ascertain exactly how these events affect voting intentions. And, although much of the published work has come from American scholars examining a substantially different kind of electoral process than Canada's parliamentary system, their conclusions are still valuable and open to borderless interpretation. For example, in 1963, John Diefenbaker's Tories charged that Lester Pearson had been deliberately groomed by American image consultants to appear more charismatic.²⁷

In With the Nation Watching: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Televised Presidential Debates, author Lee Mitchell suggests that "viewers of televised debates probably learn more about the candidates' personalities and their positions on issues than they would without them. The debates seem to sharpen the differences between candidates and sometimes to raise issues that otherwise might not be

²⁷ In the documentary "The Big Sell," *The Journal's* Brian Stewart notes that Pearson was often shown with Kennedy and he hoped the President's mystique would rub off on him. Kennedy's image consultants' influence can be seen in some of Pearson's publicity from the time, however. In one political television ad, American actress and pin-up Jayne Mansfield said she would feel "comfortable in the hands" of a Pearson government. In an interview after he left office Pearson told a story about a stunt where he was to receive a white puppy as a gift that neither he nor his wife wanted because "it would look good on television." Pearson said he couldn't think of a better example of the debasement of politics. *The Journal*, (Toronto: 10 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

addressed.”²⁸ However, image likely plays an essential part of any equation. Radio listeners judged Nixon to be the winner of the 1960 debates, while television viewers overwhelmingly favoured Kennedy.²⁹ Other works offer similar revelations. For example, in Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV, Alan Schroeder’s entertaining 2000 book, he compares these events to “television shows, governed not by the rules of rhetoric or politics but by the demand of their host medium. The values of debates are the values of television: celebrity, visuals, conflict and hype.”³⁰ For the purpose of this research, and with Mendohlson’s existing scholarly contributions in mind, it will be particularly useful to observe whether all these elements were present in the 1988 Canadian debates, and if so, whether they played a part in shaping the post-debate campaign period.

While these studies all used television news or live television events to apply or test agenda-setting, framing and priming theories in the direct reporting of an electoral contest, there are additional uses for these concepts in analysis of other types of campaign communication. Take, for instance, the campaign advertisement. In recent years televised political advertising during elections has mushroomed, and it now accounts for a large portion of any national party’s budget. A political historian who is able to apply the aforementioned theories to election advertisements can not only highlight the changing style and utility of these electoral messages over the course of modern political history, but also look for evidence of their intended impact in a specific campaign.

A review of the relevant literature reveals that advertisements were traditionally

²⁸ Lee M. Mitchell, *With the Nation Watching*, (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1979), p. 21

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁰ Alan Schroeder, *Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 9.

tailored to inform the electorate and persuade the undecided. In a 1982 experimental study titled "Some Effects and Noneffects of Campaign Commercials," Robert G. Meadow and Lee Sigelman tested a group of students in classrooms using issue-based advertisements, personality-based advertisements or a combination of the two to see if the type of message affected the cognition and beliefs of voters, as suggested by Iyengar and Kinder and McCombs and Shaw, or actual candidate preference as argued by Patterson and McClure.³¹ The experiment validated the theory of the former by finding the most effective commercials mimicked television news, which has a proven agenda-setting record.³² Here again we find evidence of the historic decline of mass communication studies' interest in the conscious persuasive power of the medium and the rise in prestige of its more subtle, subconscious influence. Historians employing television footage as source material who accept only the explicit visual and spoken message would therefore be missing the implicit dynamism of the medium in their final analysis, as this thesis will demonstrate.

It is worth noting several other studies which explore the influence of political advertising on a television audience. Kim Fridkin Kahn and John G. Greer's 2001 article "Creating Impressions: An Experimental Investigation of Political Advertising on Television," which examined how an American attack ad hurt a presidential candidate's leadership rating,³³ is an instructive piece that mirrors the manner in which Canadian political operatives could destroy a domestic candidate's credibility with the electorate. In an article that might explain a dramatic rise in advertising in the closing days of a

³¹ Robert G. Meadow and Lee Sigelman, "Some Effects and Noneffects of Campaign Commercials: An Experimental Study," *Political Behaviour*, 4, no. 2, (1982), p. 164.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 173.

³³ Kim Fridkin Kahn and John G. Greer, *Creating Impressions: An Experimental Investigation of Political Advertising*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), p. 93.

campaign, "Campaign Issue Knowledge and Salience: Comparing Reception from TV Commercials, TV News and Newspapers," found the frequent showing of ads actually proved more effective in informing and swaying passive television viewers than the news.³⁴ Charles Atkin and Gary Heald's 1976 article "Effects of Political Advertising,"³⁵ and Atkin, Lawrence Bowen, Oguz B. Nayman and Kenneth G. Sheinkopf's 1973 article "Quality Versus Quantity in Televised Political Ads"³⁶ also use experimental models and analytical techniques found in mass communications studies to investigate this part of the televised campaign strategy.

In addition to journal articles, the refinement of these skills, which is credited to scholarship emanating from social sciences, is evident in both academic and non-academic books. For example, in Crowded Airwaves: Campaign Advertising in Elections, James A. Thurber contends: "The most significant development in the study of political advertising came from within the discipline of political science. Scholars who studied political communication changed their focus from persuasion to cognition research."³⁷ Thurber states that agenda-setting, priming and framing are key ideas advertisers must understand when crafting their message; and, to draw the logical extension of his argument, they are ideas a historian studying their place in an election must understand to gain a better appreciation of the dynamics of a campaign. To illustrate: when researching an election, a student of history might ask if the growing

³⁴ Craig Leonard Brians and Martin P. Wattenberg, "Campaign Issue Knowledge and Salience: Comparing Reception from TV Commercials, TV News and Newspapers," *American Journal of Political Science*, 40, no. 1, (1996), p. 185.

³⁵ Charles K. Atkin and Gary Heald, "Effects of Political Advertising," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 40, no. 2, (1976), p. 228.

³⁶ Charles Atkin and others, "Quality Versus Quantity in Televised Political Ads," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37, no. 2, (1973), p. 209.

³⁷ James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson, eds., *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), p. 5.

body of evidence for the practice of a concept like framing theory affected the design of advertising. Framing theory suggests the messages in this type of communication can also influence the electorate's perception of what issues are important and which party or leader best reflects their values.

Frank Biocca, in his 1991 book Television and Political Advertising Vol. 2: Signs, Codes and Images, suggests it could be a symbiotic relationship. He notes that students of political advertising have turned to political consultants to get a deeper insight into how advertising really works. "This should not be surprising," he writes. "After all, speakers of English can use the language proficiently without being able to explain its syntax."³⁸ Biocca's work is a virtual handbook for constructing an effective advertisement, but it also includes the theory and history behind the advice. From Aristotle's ideas about rhetoric to modern coding and analytical discourse, Biocca reveals the logic behind typical and effective political advertising. Similar information can be gleaned from Gary Copeland and Karen John-Cartee's 1997 book Manipulation of the American Voter: Political Campaign Commercials, and Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston's 2001 work Videostyle in Presidential Campaigns: Style and Content of Televised Political Advertising. Thus, in addition to developing the psychological concepts of agenda-setting, framing and priming, social scientists have tested them in a variety of experiments and applied them to real-life case studies.

Political historians looking to expand their analytical skills need look no further than the bookshelves of their campus colleagues. Historians must now come to investigations of our political history armed with these concepts. Such consciousness

³⁸ Frank Biocca, ed., *Television and Political Advertising*, (Hillsdale, New Jersey, L. Erlbaum Associates, 1991), p. 5.

should be double-edged. Historians should apply such tools to their own dissection of the past but they must also determine whether such tools were in fact employed by the subjects under study. For example, were “agenda-setting” or the related concepts of “framing” or “priming” in fact active facets of past political contests or were they merely a useful way of understanding the past in hindsight? Was, for instance, Laurier subconsciously involved in “framing” the 1911 general election by associating free trade with national prosperity, only to be trumped by Borden who framed it with loyalty and autonomy? When addressing such questions, a historian approaching a topic like the impact of television in the 1988 election must strike a balance between searching for quantitative evidence of mass media concepts at work and seeking a qualitative explanation of why they were utilized. These are, after all, tools; the historian’s task remains the same: to determine a plausible revelation of the “truth.” The historian should understand “the big lie,” but not necessarily believe it. Accordingly, this study seeks to marry the rich possibilities of these theories to the more established approach to the past of traditional political historians. Keeping this goal in mind, a methodological reasoning of the expected field work undertaken in this thesis is in order.

The Process, The Sources And The Reasoning

All good history sits on a foundation of bygone historiography, a fact previously acknowledged by the examination of the development of Canadian election scholarship in Chapter One, a review of the types of existing contemporary works on the 1988 election in Chapter Two, and the explanation of how the theoretical concepts that will be used have been thoroughly tested earlier in this chapter. Having established its historiographic foundations and set its tools on the table, this thesis will turn its attention

to primary research. Traditionally, historians who have studied elections or political figures have relied heavily on a number of conventional sources. A review of the citations in pioneering works by such notables as Donald Creighton and Arthur R. M. Lower, reveal their tendency to use electoral rhetoric, some early polling figures, voter statistics, politicians' archival deposits, news articles and editorials to map an electoral contest. Modern researchers, this thesis argues, have additional unprecedented sources from which to draw. An inquiry into the impact of television would be remiss to ignore the wealth of televised materials in various archives, for example.

In conducting this study on the 1988 federal election, my focus will be the national televised news broadcast. The challenge is that this is an overflowing well of information and it is therefore absolutely necessary to know how to draw from it. Over the course of the 1988 election campaign (from October 1 to November 21) 52 days worth of news broadcasts were produced. Multiplied by the number of different newscasts and current events programmes shown each day and by the three major English-language networks and three major French-language networks, the job of viewing and analyzing such a collection would take an inordinate amount of time. In fact, in Frizzell and Westell's chapter on "The Media and the Campaign," in The Canadian General Election of 1988, the authors based part of their work on a content analysis, a process whereby each newscast was deconstructed into individual segments, timed and coded based on categories that ranged from the more easily identifiable persons involved to the less definable subjects. Produced by an entire class of Carleton University students studying political reporting, it was called "probably the most extensive project of its kind

ever undertaken in Canada.”³⁹ Even this media monitoring project did not attempt to examine every conceivable newscast on the major networks, focusing only on one newscast per day per English language channel, in addition to specified current affairs programs.⁴⁰ Moreover, even here some data are missing if the newscasts were not recorded and accessed by the monitors.⁴¹

To attempt a complete media analysis would be fool-hardy, if not impossible, especially since not all footage is available to review or even preserved. Broadcasters, particularly news producers, catalogue their own offerings to a certain extent. Flagship programs, such as nightly national newscasts might be preserved in their entirety and elements or footage of particular programs may be stored for future use; however, much of what is broadcast is lost almost immediately to the dustbins of history. This is perhaps a crude form of retroactive agenda-setting for future historians. More likely, in a “500 channel universe” era with hundreds of burgeoning cable channels, expansive local programming, and numerous corporate acquisitions, it’s simply impossible for broadcasters to store everything transmitted to the country’s television sets or to organize it in a way that is accessible to interested users. Luckily, the 1988 election took place before much of the electronic fragmentation, and ratings data from the Bureau of Broadcast Measurements indicate the major television networks’ flagship news programs still drew a vast numbers of viewers each night.

For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, one network – CBC’s English-language television division – will be selected for a more focused study. This research will be

³⁹ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa : Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 90

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

largely based on the network's nightly, national televised news broadcasts, specifically *The National* newscast and its companion current events magazine program, *The Journal*.

Library and Archives Canada is one depository that holds a respectable cross-section of video recordings of programs from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Société Radio-Canada and Canada's other major networks at the time, CTV, Global, TVA, TQS. Some tapes and footage have been transferred directly to the depository while other broadcasts are recorded by the archivists themselves off-air, notably some programming from the CBC, the country's public broadcaster. CBC television's flagship news program, *The National*, was taped directly from air during the time of the 1988 election campaign and its companion program, *The Journal*, received identical treatment.⁴²

The reasons for choosing to focus on these CBC programs are multifold. *The National* was a top-rated nightly news broadcast that lasted between 22 to 25 minutes without commercial interruption. Its sister news magazine program, *The Journal*, immediately followed on weeknights and filled most of the time remaining in the hour. Both programs focused extensively on the news stories of the day or major issues of the time. *The National* generally ran between 10 to 15 segments of varying lengths each night,⁴³ while *The Journal* would aim to delve more deeply into a few issues and run longer pieces, interviews or documentaries.⁴⁴ The two programs provide an excellent example of the types of current-events and news broadcasts to which the electorate of the time was exposed.

⁴² See "A Note On Sources," following the Afterword.

⁴³ Based on the broadcasts I watched. See Appendix II.

⁴⁴ See Appendix III for descriptions of the type of election related segments on *The Journal* during the campaign. Notably, the program held a series of debates on particular issues that normally spanned the entire time slot. Guests tended to be cabinet ministers, Members of Parliament and party candidates.

Additionally, there is evidence to suggest this broadcaster is the preferred choice of Canadians seeking answers to the important questions of the day. As Frizzell and Westell write in The Canadian General Election of 1988's chapter on the media, "a recent survey⁴⁵ found: 'television remains the primary source of news information for Canadians. In fact the public is most likely to rank this medium first for objectivity, accuracy and in-depth reporting. Of Canada's major television networks, the CBC/Radio Canada is by far the most trusted.'"⁴⁶

Finally, there is a practical concern. Library and Archives Canada has a mostly complete set of CBC tapes spanning the campaign, but only a sampling made available in deposits made by private broadcasters. The difficulties encountered in arranging an extended viewing session at these other networks' archives suggest a full study of another source would be unlikely. Although these networks' news programs differ slightly in terms of visual representations, commercial interruption, and additional features (most notably sports coverage and weather segments), an extensive review of one network's programming can be deemed a fair representation of broadcasts of the time if a researcher endeavours to distinguish and explain the subtle differences between network news divisions by viewing a sampling of their programming. Specifically, programming during the campaign from the Canadian Television Network (CTV), the Global Television Network, and the French-language Télédiffuseurs associés (TVA) that is available at Library and Archives Canada will be utilized when comparing the coverage on major networks. In any case, historians should opt to reveal clear examples of notable concepts

⁴⁵ Please see Michael Adams and Jordan A Levitin, "Media Bias as Viewed by the Canadian Public," in *Canadian Legislatures, 1987-8*, Robert Fleming, ed., (Ottawa: Ampersand Communications Services Inc., 1988).

⁴⁶ Frizzell and others, p. 77.

or examples of theories at work as opposed to an all-encompassing television news content analysis. That assignment is best left to communications researchers who have a better understanding of the intricacies of content coding, taking measurements and producing a statistical analysis.

Approximately 40 hours of CBC news programming will be reviewed and analyzed for the purpose of this investigation and an additional 15 hours of other networks' news programming will be similarly studied to ensure CBC reporting was not substantially different in focus, content or style from other broadcasters. In other words, the CBC English news on television will be used as the norm in this research with quality checks performed on it by sampling the coverage on several other major networks. In some instances, the CBC programs were not available, not recorded for archival purposes, or damaged in the National Archives' CBC Fonds.⁴⁷ Although this missing data unfortunately precludes a hermetic study, a holistic analysis of the campaign and search for major trends will not suffer inordinately from the omission of a smattering of programs.

When examining and analyzing each program and each news segment within it, several measurements will be noted for the purpose of testing the aforementioned mass communications concepts: the total time of the broadcast, the time of each election-related segment and the order or line-up of all segments within the broadcast. Although subtle, these elements have been shown to have a significant influence on how a viewer perceives the news. The amount of time devoted to covering the election and the placement of the segments will reveal how important the campaign was in the eyes of producers in comparison to the rest of the news of the day. If, for example, election

⁴⁷ Please see "A Note on Sources," following the Afterword.

coverage fills half of the total time allotted to a broadcast, a viewer will appreciate the magnitude of the subject on a given day or over the course of a number of weeks. Similarly, much like the front page of a newspaper, the first story of a nightly news broadcast – by virtue of its primacy – is considered to be the most important story of the day. News segments will also be coded in sub-categories to better allow for the application of specific theoretical concepts. Extensive coverage of party leaders or specific issues, for instance, will be noted and taken to be evidence of their relative importance. Brief stories or subjects that do not attract significant coverage will not be weighted to the same degree as longer stories or more conspicuous subject matter because the secondary literature suggests there is a quantifiable element to agenda-setting theories.

Each program featuring election-related material will be observed qualitatively with attention given to visual, audio, and linguistic elements. When inspecting the primary source from this perspective, it will be necessary to detect whether political strategists or the news media presented content in a manner that furthered a particular agenda. For instance, if free trade was the subject of a report what visuals were employed to illustrate the narrative? Candidates opposed to the proposed free trade agreement may have appeared in a setting that would tug at latent nationalist heartstrings in hopes of framing the issue as debate over sovereignty. In contrast, those in favour of the agreement may use an export business as a background to suggest the issue be associated with economic growth. And, as much as the visual is essential to the television medium, sounds in these reports and the words used by both reporters and their sources are

additional elements to contemplate when searching for evidence of agenda-setting – and, in particular, framing.

In effect, the social scientist's eye will be applied to *quantitatively* assessing the coverage and the historian's eye will assess the *qualitative* content of these broadcasts. Drawing on this partnership, evidence of agenda-setting by both partisan campaigners and the media, framing of the debate, priming of party leaders and journalists' use of the horse race metaphor should be gleaned at the same time as a more conventional narrative of events unfolds from the historian's empirical inquiry.

Analysis of paid political advertising on television and focused interrogation of the leaders' debates will offer this research a second avenue of investigation. Some advertisements are captured on the taped broadcasts of the newscasts in the fonds of CBC, CTV, Global, and TVA. In these cases, the chronological placement of the advertisements and the frequency of their appearance will add an additional thread of information for analytical purposes. The Progressive Conservative Party fonds at Library and Archives Canada also include two video tape compilations of all the party's advertisements and the television advertisements of their two major challengers, the Liberals and the NDP. Although these digests unfortunately remove the ads from the context in which they were shown, when collected together the evolution of campaign messages becomes apparent. An additional example of the medium's importance comes by way of the televised debates. These campaign events, which were organized by a consortium of television networks in consultation with the political parties, were taped directly off-air by Library and Archives Canada and stored as a separate item in the institution's directory. Two three-hour TV debates, one in French on October 24, 1988

and one in English the following night, were conducted in a format in which all three major party leaders appeared together to offer opening and closing statements and squared off in one-on-one situations with each other three times during each debate. When his two opponents faced off, the other debater was seated in the studio, off screen. These two prominent elements of the campaign conveyed the messages of politicians and party strategists directly to viewers without the mediation of reporters or editors. Although reporters and commentators subsequently provided opinion and analysis of these messages and broadcasts, they carried a direct-to-you quality in their original form. Deconstructing these exchanges should reveal more evidence of agenda-setting techniques employed by party strategists.

The intersection of politics and the electronic media will also require the construction of a statistical backdrop demonstrating Canada's situation as an electronic nation by 1988. Thus, to demonstrate the importance of television as an electioneering tool and essential form of communication, it will be necessary to chart the increase in the number of television sets in homes and the frequency and duration of viewing with data from Statistics Canada, to examine the popularity of news programming through ratings collected by the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement – an audience measurement company founded in 1944 which uses a system of diaries that a sampling of the public submits in its tracking reports – and to explore data collected by advertising firms to discover which type of commercials, images and sound influenced viewers most.

Following an extensive review of these primary sources, additional oral interviews with prominent participants in this election will be undertaken. From an academic point of view, these will help to validate the concepts and theories applied in

this study. Interviews will also serve as a tool to confirm the working hypothesis and to gain more insight into the minds of the actors who produced the messages, reported on them, or measured their results. Although a focus on these sources might be deemed elitist or Whiggish, the purpose of this investigation is twofold: to illuminate the opinion-makers who created or transmitted these messages and images to the masses and to understand the elements which influenced the electorate's agency. Interviews will thus elucidate the role of what used to be called "back room boys" in scripting a party's message and image and take the analysis inside the "media machine" that monitored the election and influenced its outcome.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to establish one element of the 1988 federal election campaign in detail, that is, to infuse a historical narrative account with new insight gleaned from analytical tools borrowed from the social sciences, and to put the effects of a medium in historical context. To accomplish this goal, this research will acknowledge traditional historical source material and method while utilizing the interdisciplinary techniques that are necessary to bring a textual analysis to modern sources such as television footage.

Although countless factors likely influenced the voting choices of individual Canadians during this campaign, a reading of the existing secondary source material, combined with an examination of primary sources, suggests that no other campaign in the history of Canadian federal politics likely turned on the power of the televised medium as greatly as the 1988 election. For the first time in the country's history, the electorate gave a mandate to a party proposing a free trade deal with the United States. As this thesis will reveal, the result was far from certain during the campaign and at one point the anti-free

trade forces looked set to pull off a victory as they had in 1891 and 1911 – also topsy-turvy campaigns. However, unlike those two earlier contests, the pro-free trade forces had a secret weapon at their disposal. To combat the fear and protectionist, nationalist sentiment in the electorate that their opponents successfully brought to a boil, the pro-free traders used the surest means available to reach a mass audience: they turned to and tuned in to the power of television.

Chapter Four – Pulling Into The Starting Gates: Initial Struggles To Agenda Set, To Objectively Report And To Win Over Audiences On The Campaign Trail

As Canadians enjoyed the start of the always-too-brief summer season in June 1988, a brand-new parliamentary correspondent joined the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Ottawa bureau. Working in the television division, Keith Boag's first big assignment was to cover the federal Liberals in advance of the next general election. Approaching the four-year mark of the Progressive Conservative government's first term in office, a time when majority governments traditionally seek a new mandate, the reporter's first few months on the job looked set to be a veritable trial by fire.

"I was very new," he remembers. "I had never covered a campaign before."¹ Excited about assuming his new position, he especially looked forward to the frequent travel across the country necessitated by the assignment, and the upcoming election would provide plenty of opportunity for that. Since the advent of regular commercial aviation and near instantaneous telecommunications in the 1950s, federal elections had increasingly become fast-paced foot races back and forth across the country. Like most any other person starting a new job, Boag had some understandable anxiety and jitters to overcome; however, the correspondent was especially worried about one aspect of his new responsibilities and it was grinding away at the pit of his stomach. "In 1985 I remember making a bet on the next election with somebody who said (Liberal leader John) Turner would win it," he recalls. "To my everlasting regret I took it and predicted (Progressive Conservative leader Brian) Mulroney would win. And all through the campaign I fretted about whether this \$50 bet would influence my reporting in the

¹ Keith Boag, interview by author, March 13, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

campaign.”²

Although he laughs about his wager 20 years later, Boag’s nagging concern that his coverage might be even remotely biased stands as a stark reminder of the power and responsibility which his job as a network television reporter entailed. With millions of people watching his stories on CBC’s *The National* every night during the campaign,³ Boag and his fellow reporters were invited into the homes of hundreds of thousands of Canadians and trusted to present a fair and accurate account of the day’s events.⁴ Boag could sense the weight of the CBC’s mantle of objectivity.⁵ These viewers’ opinions of party leaders and candidates, their sense of what issues were important in the campaign and their ideas of a distant political reality would be shaped by mass media sources, and particularly by television.

Though outright bias might be recognized by viewers and accepted, rejected or deconstructed accordingly, the more subtle aspects of the medium’s capabilities were not as easy for unwary viewers to detect. The time a reporter spent covering an event, the position of a story in a news broadcast, the clips – soundbytes – chosen, the manner in which the narrative was designed, the composition of camera shots and his or her general

² Ibid.

³ Unfortunately, Ryerson University, a depository for the Bureau of Broadcast Measurements’ historical ratings, has a gap in its holdings and the necessary reports from 1988-1991 were discovered to be missing during a research trip. Every effort was made to find alternate copies, however at the time of this thesis’ submission, none were available to consult. However, a glance at the previous year’s report for the Fall period found CBC’s *The National* to have an audience in the millions, and it was often the network’s highest rated program of the night. If we were to use Statistics Canada’s *Culture Statistics: Television Viewing in Canada 1986-1988*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, 1990), p. 8, to extrapolate, we could reasonably assume the program’s audience remained relatively stable. In fact, the report notes that news and public affairs programs accounted 18.7 per cent of all programs watched in 1988 compared to 17.1 per cent in 1987, p. 12. This could suggest ratings for *The National* were even higher.

⁴ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa : Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 77.

⁵ Robert J. F. Albota, “Dan McArthur’s concept of objectivity and his struggle to defend the integrity of the CBC News Service, 1940-1945,” (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1988).

information gate-keeping tendencies all could have an immeasurable effect on the audience. This was the McLuhanesque implication of the new electronic news making – the medium was part of the message.

As cognizant as reporters and editors were of their immense power to inform and influence an audience, campaign strategists and politicians were just as keenly aware that exploiting that power could serve their partisan interests. These behind-the-scene planners learned ways to co-opt a medium which fostered an intimate connection between a message and its intended audience with persuasive subliminal effects. Although other more traditional methods were employed to reach and sway voters, such as the print and radio broadcast media, direct mailings, and local canvassing and rallies, there was little doubt in the minds of these partisans that the small screen was absolutely essential to any successful modern campaign.

Senator Norman Atkins, the Progressive Conservatives' national campaign co-chair, explains that years of first-hand experience had taught him by 1988 that "in a campaign it's the television media that have the biggest influence on voter perception."⁶ In the months and years preceding an election, Atkins says he gives newspapers the edge in general influence, "but during the campaign, television is an incredibly powerful medium and it can sway voter behaviour."⁷ The 1988 election would be proof of that.

One of his competitors from the New Democratic Party agrees entirely. Robin Sears, co-national campaign director for the NDP in the 1988 campaign, and the party's point-man for media relations management, suggests that strategists always have a good chuckle at the post-campaign academic analysis that "always gives tremendous support to

⁶ Senator Norman Atkins, interview by author, April 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁷ Ibid.

the newspaper columnists and the party platforms as the key inputs for ballot choice when those of us in the business know that neither of those things matter hardly at all.”⁸ Many interviewees tend to justify their vote after-the-fact by emphasizing the more dense and intellectual media when television in fact played a more substantial role in their decision-making than they would like others to believe. When ranking the most important components of mass media conduits, Sears argues that “television news coverage is the most valuable, particularly if positive, but also in volume compared to your competitors’; television paid advertising is next in importance in terms of persuasion, and what they would call television chat, panels and reporter commentary – which is an increasing phenomenon but not so much in those days – are third. Well down the list are, unfortunately, print journalists.”⁹

Although the 1988 federal campaign was certainly not the first time strategists used the medium to convey a message, it was arguably the first time in Canadian electoral politics that television surpassed all other forms of communication with voters in the minds of campaign teams. Author John Duffy, who has written about the evolution of federal campaigns in *Fights of Our Lives*, explains that television has become more and more important to contemporary campaign strategy and the 1988 election was “a big leap in that direction. By ’88 everyone knew that television was the primary medium. In ’84 you could argue it either way, but by ’88 the debate was over.”¹⁰ CBC senior parliamentary editor Don Newman notes that “even in ’84 the newspapers tended to break the big stories.” But in this campaign, a report about the internal warfare in the highest ranks of the Liberal Party, was “the biggest story of the campaign and it changed

⁸ Robin Sears, interview by author, March 24, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Duffy, interview by author, March 17, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

the outcome of the campaign *and television had it* [emphasis added].”¹¹

The battle for control of the media and the messages it would disseminate to the general population in the 1988 election campaign was, then, predominantly pitched for control of the country’s television screens. As such, each party had to design a campaign that would be compliant with the medium’s demands and schedule the types of events that would appeal to newscasters. If these strategists presented a product – an issue, an event – and newsworthy footage that would fit into the nightly news during the campaign, they could concentrate subsequently on building the volume and frequency of stories, and creating a positive and cohesive message that would resonate with voters and influence their choice. In short, they could redirect the trajectory of the campaign or, at the very least, influence the public’s reception of issues. Ultimately, a successful media campaign would assist in the party’s attempt to frame the ballot-box question for the electorate and ensure the top issues on the voter’s mind would flatter the party’s leader, platform and image. Accordingly, before the campaign began, each party set to work on crafting a predominant and over-arching campaign theme. An investigation of the types of campaign stops and events that followed reveals the great extent to which the message was tailored to the media.

Ladies And Gentlemen, This Campaign Is About...

Although the political armies remain largely the same from year to year, the battleground is constantly shifting and finding the issue that will win an election can be more difficult than finding an empty table at a Canadian pub during Game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals. There are some tools available to use as a compass, however. In the 1870s, for instance, the wily “old fox” John A. Macdonald used a succession of summer

¹¹ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

picnics to gauge the public's receptivity to his bold new National Policy. As methods for gauging public opinion became more refined, campaign teams would come to rely on pollsters to find winning conditions. Since its introduction to Canadian politics in the 1940s, polling has become the tool of choice for divining the public mood.

With a majority in the House of Commons, the Progressive Conservative government, elected in 1984, was unlikely to be defeated on a confidence issue and forced to the polls. As a result, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney could be reasonably assured that he would control the timing of the next vote. Nonetheless, planning for the campaign was an early consideration in the Tories' first term. The prime minister called on Norman Atkins to begin preparations in 1986.¹² The Senator, who had also chaired the successful 1984 election campaign, brought a number of talented strategists on board to decide what the government should submit to the electorate in hopes of achieving a new mandate, including a young pollster named Allan Gregg. Gregg, a political science graduate student from Carleton University, would utilize strategic polling and focus groups to test virtually every message the party made a concerted effort to promote. Deciding the general campaign theme was his most important assignment. It would be the melody to the micro-messaging harmony.

"The Tories Managing Change"

Robert Krause, author of the Progressive Conservative segment of the Canadian General Election of 1988's chapter on "The Parties and the Campaign," notes the "crucial question of a campaign theme" was designed to "set the campaign agenda and ideally structure the issues voters would think about."¹³ Image and branding were of utmost

¹² Atkins interview.

¹³ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press,

importance to the party's strategy. "Focus groups of voters had been asked a series of questions designed to probe how they viewed the party at present and, more crucially, how ideally they would like to visualize the party in the future," he discloses. "From their responses to the questions a series of prospective logos had been constructed, and after testing by focus groups a new forward-looking party logo was created."¹⁴

Implicit in this campaign about the future was what substantial acts the Tories had accomplished *in the past*, and research indicated that a promotional campaign stressing "hard work" would be received positively by voters.¹⁵ As Krause explains, "The basic premise of this theme was that just as Canadians were hard working and had to make tough choices on how they would live their lives, so too had the government. It was felt by its proponents that such a message would personalize and link the party's campaign with voters and allow the party to concentrate during the election on its perceived strengths of a strong economy and sound fiscal management, as well as deflect opposition criticisms of alleged shortcomings in the government's record."¹⁶ Progressive Conservative parliamentarians, on the whole, were not enamoured of the theme, however, and some argued that its defensive posturing would not bode well for attempts to sell plans for the post-election period.

Returning to the drawing board, Gregg and his researchers found another idea that potentially seemed to find traction with voters. The government would now recommend to voters that their choice should be based on "the party and leader capable of managing

1989), p. 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶ Ibid.

change.”¹⁷ Krause suggests “the ‘managing change’ theme had several attributes in its favour. First, it focused the electorate’s attention on the past accomplishments of the party in government: the reduction in the budget deficit, the strengthened economy, and improved federal-provincial relations could all be emphasized as 1984 election campaign commitments made and kept. Second, the theme directed public awareness to the future beyond 1988. Here, the realignment of federal-provincial powers, the Free Trade Agreement, and the national daycare programme could be pointed to as proof that the party had the vision, a leader and a team capable of meeting domestic and international challenges.”¹⁸

Moreover, the theme took subtle jabs at the party’s main competitors. By stressing the capability of the leader, the Conservatives took aim at John Turner. The Liberal leader was handed an unruly caucus in 1984 and in the aftermath of a poor election showing and divisive leadership campaign, he had already faced questions about his abilities and even survived a putsch from within.¹⁹ If Turner had lost the confidence of his own party and caucus, the Tories hoped Canadians would ask themselves why *they* should have any confidence in him.

Conversely, Ed Broadbent was consistently picked as the most popular federal leader in advance of the campaign.²⁰ Canadians may not have uniformly agreed with his politics, but there was a sense they genuinely liked and respected him. Unfortunately, Broadbent was polling far above his party, and, as the NDP had never governed on the federal level, there were lingering doubts about whether they were up to the job.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Graham Fraser, *Playing For Keeps: The Making Of The Prime Minister, 1988*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), p. 84-87.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

Mulroney might have rubbed some voters the wrong way and he did not necessarily warm their hearts, but he was viewed as a competent leader. In fact, according to a CBC poll a few weeks into the campaign, although Broadbent came out on top in terms of likability and honesty, Mulroney was viewed to be the most competent, to be the most decisive, to have the best vision for the future and to make the best prime minister.²¹ In other words, Canadians may not have really liked Mulroney as a person, but they were content to have him leading the country and confident in his abilities. If change was in the wind, better, the reasoning went, to have a more seasoned sailor like Mulroney at the helm.

Finally, the theme of change and how to handle it spoke to voter concerns that would turn up in polling research, but that could not be coherently summed up into a single issue. Despite having a strong and growing economy, Canadians had a sense that their lives were too good to be true, or at least too good to last. Gregg referred to the condition as “millennial anxiety” among voters.²² “We pick it up in questions like, ‘By 2001, do you think you’ll be able to drink water out of the tap? Will the average family be able to afford a home? Will we be able to afford medicare? Will you be safe walking the streets?’ The answers are ‘No. No. No. No.’” Gregg told author Robert Mason Lee in 100 Monkeys. “People think there’s something out there, but they don’t know what it is. They just know there was more change in the last 10 years than in the last fifty, and there’s going to be more change in the next ten years than in the last century.”²³ One of the biggest changes to come would be the proposed Free Trade Agreement with the

²¹ *The National*, (Toronto: 16 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

²² Lee, p. 70.

²³ Ibid.

United States. "Because Gregg had picked up this cynicism and because he found free trade less appealing among the so-called 'protect-me' list of voters (women, the poor, youth), the decision was taken to portray Mulroney in the 1988 campaign as one who would protect citizens from the worst effects of change," Lee explains. "Although change could not be stopped, and millennial anxiety would not be put to rest, an effort would be made to tag the Conservative leader with the reassuring label of 'manager of change.'"²⁴

Managing change was not an issue that would have likely come immediately to the top of voters' minds when they thought about what was important to consider in the election, however. When questioned by pollsters, voters were more apt to say that foreign relations, the economy, the environment, social programs or crime were the most pressing issues of the day.²⁵ The single most dominant issue of the campaign had yet to be established, however, and the governing party could not wait to see which of these concerns would emerge from the *mélée*. Rather, the party's managing change theme would encompass a wide range of these concerns and Conservative strategists would essay to make it *the* issue. So, in contrast to Davey's belief that a party should find the issue that was most favourable to the party and try to make that the issue of the election, Gregg hypothesized that a campaign team could create an issue. It should strike early to set the election's agenda and ensure that the agenda encompassed a sufficient number of issues to make the other parties and the electorate at large come to it. "It used to be an election was won by the ability to determine what the question was in the minds of the public," the party pollster states. "Now, through the technology of polling and television, it makes it increasingly able to set the question in the mind of the electorate – what they

²⁴ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 16 October, 1988).

believe they'll be deciding on election day."²⁶

Lee elaborates that the "fundamental change in electoral strategy – from sensing the right issue to imbuing any issue with the right meaning – was made possible by the research techniques developed for product marketing. Rather than merely monitoring voter intention, pollsters found they could conduct research – known as psychographics – that unearthed the underlying hopes, fears and emotions of the public."²⁷ Marketers used psychographic techniques to infuse meaning into a neutral object by associating powerful imagery with it. Having a Starbucks coffee, for example, is as much about getting a caffeine fix as it is about enjoying the experience of watching a barista prepare a cup of java while listening to some carefully-selected music in an inviting bistro. In a recent ad campaign for the Jeep 4x4explorer, the company wanted the audience to believe what they were purchasing was "more than just a Jeep, it's a way of life."²⁸ As Gregg observed matter-of-factly, "the biggest differences between selling Brian Mulroney and selling soap are that soap doesn't talk and its competitors don't say it's a crock of shit."²⁹ Although Tory strategists had to deal with critics, whether on tour for television cameras or in party advertisements, they took their theme and their candidate to voters with a market-tested sales pitch. In examining the announcements of over 70 projects that were made in the weeks before the election, Krause concludes the flurry of activity was designed to increase media attention and send a message that the Tories were in control and had a sound agenda.³⁰ In effect, the ethos and trajectory of the election were set long before the writ was dropped. They were set in focus groups, in strategists' round tables

²⁶ Lee, p. 41.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *More Than Just a Jeep – It's a Way of Life!* Available from <http://www.wayalife.com/>, Internet.

²⁹ Lee, p. 42.

³⁰ Frizell and others, p. 15.

and opinion analysis that were all more reminiscent of a new car model launch than a political election.

"Not Letting Mulroney Deceive You Again. Vote Liberal"

In contrast to the focused message Mulroney's handlers had designed for their champion, Liberal leader John Turner's efforts to return his party to its regional organizational roots [which ran counter to the successful strategy of centralization that was developed under Lester B. Pearson, Keith Davey and Walter Gordon in the 1960s]³¹ forced him to reconcile competing interests. The result, in his first attempt at winning a mandate in 1984, was a spectacular failure. As Krause notes, Turner had entered that campaign with "no policy weaponry;" internal disputes over positions on certain issues also allowed the media to paint the party as "hopelessly divided."³² Determined not to repeat the same mistakes, Turner asked the party's grassroots membership interested in policy to come up with a plan of action. In consultation with the Liberal Party's research bureau and policy experts, three regional conferences yielded 40 separate policy positions. "Each policy was supported by an extensive background paper that analyzed the government's record and the NDP's position, explained the principle on which the Liberals stood and outlined what action a Liberal government would take."³³ Thus, while the Tories took a highly centralized, closed door, preemptive approach to the election's planning, the Liberals threw the door wide open and canvassed the grassroots.

With a solid program and plans now in place, Liberal strategists worked on finding their over-arching theme. Once again, a pollster was employed to discover to what message the electorate would be most receptive. In the months leading up to the

³¹ Ibid., p. 29.

³² Ibid., p. 32.

³³ Ibid.

election call, Martin Goldfarb's research had found that no party was the clear favourite of Canadian voters and there was pervasive indecision about for whom to vote. Although the Liberals seemed to be girding for a fight over free trade, as they had used their Senate majority to stall its passage, Goldfarb told the senior party strategists that in his opinion "the research demonstrated that free trade could not carry the Liberals to victory in the election, because it did not give a clear enough indication of Turner's vision for the country."³⁴ In similar fashion to Gregg's plan to fit free trade under the canopy of managing change, Goldfarb firmly believed it "should be used as a device to demonstrate that Mulroney cannot and should not be trusted."³⁵

Summing up the strategy that had been agreed upon, Graham Fraser, in his book Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, reports that the Grits would use the slogan "Don't let Mulroney deceive you again" to "remind Canadians of the dark side of the Mulroney government's record, and dwell on what opinion-polling analysts call 'the negatives': the fact that Goldfarb's research showed that Mulroney was arrogant, was likely to say what he thought people wanted to hear, and was likelier to favour business interests than the interests of the middle class. Turner's attack on the Free Trade Agreement would be ammunition in this fight, but not the only ammunition. Then, to persuade the voters that the Liberals had a program for government, the party would present a forty-point program laying out progressive policies in housing, childcare, cultural policy, and so on."³⁶

Fraser notes that Turner, fresh from a tour of New Brunswick and Newfoundland just before the election, found his anti-free trade barn-burner had gone down especially

³⁴ Fraser, p. 102

³⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁶ Ibid.

well and he was convinced the free trade agreement was *the issue*.³⁷ Nevertheless, he deferred to the power of the demi-god pollster and agreed to fit it into to a broad theme. The agenda setters were taking the upper hand over the leaders.

"Giving Ed a chance."

As the 1988 campaign dawned, the New Democrats were so close to an historic breakthrough they could barely contain themselves. Having led in the opinion polls as recently as the previous year and with its most popular party leader by far at the helm, the NDP could realistically and legitimately argue the campaign would be a tight three-way race. There were ominous clouds on the horizon, however.

With the party now firmly in the big leagues, the NDP would face "an unprecedented degree of public scrutiny and external attack,"³⁸ according to the party's former federal secretary, Dennis Young. The Liberals' and Conservatives' campaign themes and strategies posed particular problems for a party desperately trying to avoid being squeezed out. Broadbent's chief-of-staff, George Nakitsas, warned of the emerging threat in his January 1988 analysis of public opinion polling data. As Fraser explains, "Free trade was possibly emerging as a 'vote-determining issue,' and the Tories were trying to use free trade, along with Meech Lake and tax reform, to move public opinion away from doubts about credibility and integrity that had dogged them for the last few years. Similarly, the Liberals were trying to use free trade to shift public attention away from their own internal divisions."³⁹

Nakitsas' reading of the tea leaves also found some reason for optimism in the face of this challenge. If the party overcame this attempted squeeze-play, they could find

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

a recipe for success in their popular leader and their desire to represent ordinary voters. Accordingly, Nakitsas contended the party's "primary message should and must continue to focus on Ed Broadbent and on more fairness, openness and honesty for average Canadians."⁴⁰ He also found resonance in "the perennial 'time for a change' message." Comments like "they deserve a chance," and "give 'em a chance," routinely found their way into opinion research.⁴¹ Julie Mason, the NDP's director of communications summed up Nakitsas' findings this way: "Our task, throughout this campaign, is to touch the chord in people that says 'I've had it with those other two guys, Ed Broadbent is for ordinary folks like me, so this time I'm giving Ed a chance.' In simple terms, the campaign looks like this: 1) who's been speaking for you, and who will speak for you? 2) This time, give Ed a chance."⁴² One could say the NDP's approach to setting the agenda was much more simplistic and relied on the old social democratic virtues.

By the time the writ was dropped on October 1 each political party with representation in the House of Commons had used polling and focus-group testing to create a campaign theme. Topical issues that could be fitted snugly into the party's desired narrative would be pursued with alacrity while issues which went against the grain of the message would be avoided whenever possible. Additionally, each campaign team would design a tour for the party leader that would reinforce this theme with events and photo opportunities especially geared towards the televised media. The agendas were set, the campaign was ready to be framed, and the leaders primed for maximum controlled exposure; however, the news media would not passively transmit the parties' message without it first being filtered. Reporters, producers and editors had their own

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 132.

ideas of how the story of Campaign '88 would be told.

The Best Laid Plans: Television Expectations For The Election

Elly Alboim, a former CBC parliamentary bureau chief and senior producer of CBC news specials, is a man who has seen Canadian election campaigns from both sides of the politics/media divide. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Alboim, now a principal of the Earncliffe Strategy Group in Ottawa, would serve as an advisor to Paul Martin during his tenures as finance minister and prime minister. As some of his former colleagues reported on Martin's campaign, Alboim lent his extensive experience in the field to a politician who, coincidentally, first sought a seat in the House of Commons during the 1988 election. At that time, Alboim was managing all of CBC television's election coverage, including news content, assignments for reporters and election night results and analysis; and he had a clear idea of what he hoped his team would accomplish over the course of the campaign. In effect, he too attempted to set the voters' agenda for the election, albeit with a mind to what the public wanted to learn.

"We had a one-or-two day seminar on how to cover election campaigns,"⁴³ he remembers. At the conference reporters and producers learned what the parties wanted to accomplish, what the media wanted to accomplish, what the media's objectives should be, how to anticipate and understand the rhythm of the campaign, and the price and consequences of polling. Although politicians and political reporters have a symbiotic relationship, there is always a measure of competition and adversarial dynamics between the two. Alboim ensured his staff took a critical look at the game about to be played.

An especially important aspect of the seminar was an examination of agenda-

⁴³ Elly Alboim, interview by author, April 10, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

setting and a debate about whom has the right to agenda set.⁴⁴ Alboim says he falls between the two extremes of what the party feels is appropriate and what the reporters think is appropriate. “If the parties had their way, the media would be a passive conduit and if the media had its way, it would set the agenda for election campaigns,” he argues. “My view is parties have a right to speak to the people, particularly during an election campaign; they have a right to set their own agenda and we have an obligation to examine that agenda and analyze it. We probably have the right to bring to the table issues that the parties aren’t comfortable talking about. But an election is not about the media, generally. It’s about the people’s agenda and the party’s agenda.”⁴⁵

Ultimately, each reporter in the field would use their own discretion when striking a balance between the party’s goals, the media’s needs and the public interest. However, Alboim’s team planned a number of stories in advance to enhance the day-to-day events-based coverage that would largely focus on the leaders’ tours. In fact, although the CBC’s *The Journal*, which immediately followed *The National*, normally produced documentaries or issues-based stories, Alboim says his nightly news did not shy away from sharing the territory. Thus, even before the writ was dropped, a kind of adversarial agenda-setting had emerged. The politicians might propose what issues and themes should be on the top of a voter’s mind, but the media’s ability to ultimately present the issues to its audience could help or hinder the parties’ plans.

“We had our own issues-based reporting and in fact we allocated a significant amount of air space on *The National* for issues-based reporting,” he asserts. “We actually divided it into news coverage, process coverage, issues coverage and kind of geographic

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

horse-race coverage. And at the beginning of the campaign we established 50, 60, 70 stories that we wanted done by the end of the campaign and they were slotted as we went. In fact, *The Journal* often lamented the way we covered the election because they felt they were doing enough of the issues stories.”⁴⁶

One particular issue-based story the CBC and other networks examined in great detail prior to the election was the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Although none of the parties initially wanted the debate over the free trade deal to play anything other than a supporting role in the campaign, the news media recognized the magnitude of the issue and devoted considerable attention to it. Peter Mansbridge, anchor of *The National*, notes that the topic did not seem to lend itself very well to the traditional two-or-three minute report a viewer would normally expect to see. Nevertheless, the network news teams lavished substantial resources and analysis on the issue because the reporters and producers believed it was their duty to give the public as much information as they could about a treaty that could fundamentally alter the course of Canadian history. Here we have evidence of popular resistance to agenda-setting by the media. The television audience appeared to be less than electrified by the extensive coverage, and Mansbridge recalls receiving letters from viewers pleading “enough already.”⁴⁷ As a result, although free trade had been a major item on the news agenda and would continue to be discussed on broadcasts, there would not be blanket coverage to the detriment of other issues.

The Pre-Race Odds And Stakes

In sum, as the 1988 election approached, both the political parties and the news media had particular ideas of what central issues and themes would be submitted to the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Peter Mansbridge, interview by author, April 19, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

public. This campaign was groomed well in advance of the dropping of the writ as each major political party set about designing what they hoped would be a winning message for them. The Progressive Conservatives, using sophisticated public opinion gathering measuring techniques, and mindful of the phenomenon of “millennial anxiety,” crafted a theme of managing change that played to their leader’s and government’s managerial strengths. The Liberal Party allowed its grassroots to manufacture detailed party policy, but also used advance message development strategy to define what they believed to be a winning theme. Thus, the party would target the prime minister’s major weakness – his ethics and honesty in government – while subsequently promoting their own extensive policy plans as an alternative. Having warned voters not to let Mulroney deceive them again, the party would ask them to vote Liberal. The NDP, sensing voter disgust with and cynicism about the other parties and politics in general banked on their popular leader to appeal to the electorate. With the straightforward plea, “Give Ed a chance,” the social democratic party made plans to make their leader a central and attractive element of the campaign.

The news media, although willing to transmit these messages, prepared to deconstruct them for their audience and touch upon other issues – notably free trade – which the parties planned to downplay. In this sense, the media would not only serve as a conduit that transmitted messages, but an active participant in submitting additional messages and characterizing and putting into context the ones which did originate from the parties.

Elections in an electronic age are therefore less linear and less pre-ordained. Parties can obtain an advantage by initially setting an agenda, but the subsequent course

of the election is largely at the mercy of the activism engaged in by the electronic media and the manner in which messages are accepted or rejected by the people to which they are targeted. As the networks set their specific agenda and the electorate asserts its preferred agenda, the parties learn to groom their own agendas accordingly.

Preparing For Battle

The exact date of the election remained unknown to the media, opposition parties and even Progressive Conservatives outside of the prime minister's inner circle. Yet Alboim had done his best to prepare his team for the inevitable. "One of the rather prophetic things I told them is that I was sure there would be one or two big surprises over the course of the campaign that would change the nature of the campaign," the producer divulges.⁴⁸ As the campaign began in earnest, however, few people could have predicted just how surprising the next seven weeks would be.

⁴⁸ Alboim interview.

Chapter Five – And They’re Off: An Initial Characterization Of The Campaign

The prime minister’s handlers knew their man had a penchant for straying from a prepared script. Almost always an engaging speaker, Brian Mulroney was particularly strong at firing up loyal crowds with jokes or some finely crafted rhetoric. While staunch Tory supporters lapped up this shoot-from-the-hip style, undecided voters were not always so appreciative of overtly partisan attacks. Mulroney also rarely hesitated to put hecklers in their place or to debate or lecture reporters who questioned his actions or policy. Again, while this worked well in front of supporters who could be counted on to follow the leader even when he lost the plot, Mulroney’s unplanned departures from his agenda did his strategists few favours. As an incumbent, and not an overwhelmingly popular one, the Progressive Conservative campaign team was keenly aware that these tangents would not be helpful to their cause, and they must be avoided at all cost.¹

The Tories took a page from the Liberals’ successful 1980 campaign book and designed a campaign that would minimize any chance of drawing unwanted attention. Former Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark had led his party to victory in the 1979 campaign by focusing on Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s negative personal qualities and by attempting to tap into voter dislike and fatigue of the Liberal leader. Learning from their mistakes, in the 1980 rematch the Liberals attempted to downplay their unpredictable leader and to play up their “team.” Although the strategy worked well, due in no small part to Trudeau’s hostile one-man-against-the-world style, the Tories soon found themselves back on the campaign trail after a failed budget.

¹ For a more thorough examination of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s temperament and style, please refer to: Michel Gratton, *Still The Boss: A Candid Look at Brian Mulroney*, (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1990); Michel Gratton, *“So, What Are The Boys Saying?”: An Inside Look at Brian Mulroney in Power*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1987); David Jay Bercuson and others, *Sacred*

Author John Duffy suggests the Conservatives were determined in 1980 to remind voters why they voted out Trudeau's party less than a year earlier, but the Liberals were just as determined to prevent history from repeating itself. "Rather than give the PCs a target they determined to deprive them of Trudeau for the duration of the 1980 campaign... One of Canadian history's most charismatic figures was deliberately 'low-bridged' – kept off-stage and out of sight through a sixty-five-day election campaign."² Party strategists Keith Davey and Jim Coutts kept Trudeau in a plane flying between planned events in a peek-a-boo campaign. "Whenever the Liberals' Flying Dutchman tour actually touched down for an event," Duffy notes, "Trudeau would plod through the same prepared speech with little variation from one venue to the next."³ Although this strategy didn't forcefully set or reinforce the Liberals' own agenda for the campaign, it masterfully muted their opponents' rallying cry.

More importantly, the strategy kept the Liberal leader from saying or doing anything that might detract from the simple message his party wanted voters to hear and see: we are competent. Duffy contends that "Trudeau, who had so fiercely insisted on running the campaign his way the previous spring, acquiesced to the low-bridging strategy with surprising ease. [Party pollster Martin] Goldfarb said that talking national unity would reduce support in English Canada? Fine, Trudeau would keep unity talk to a minimum. Verbal duels with hecklers get in the way of the message? No problem, Trudeau would hold his temper. Need to play up the Liberal team? Good, Trudeau would

Trust?: Brian Mulroney and the Conservative Party in Power, (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1986); Rae Murphy and others, *Brian Mulroney, The Boy From Baie-Comeau*, (Toronto: Lorimer, 1984).

² John Duffy, *Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership and the Making of Canada*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 291.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

sit patiently listening to his candidates' speeches..."⁴ In essence, the Liberals, far ahead in the polls prior to the dropping of the writ, aimed to win by not losing. The ploy worked: Trudeau won the 1980 election with just over 44 per cent of the vote and formed a majority government with 147 Liberal seats in a Parliament of 282.⁵

First Out Of The Gate – The Conservatives Reveal Their Agenda

In 1988, the roles were reversed, but the strategy remained the same. Mulroney was instructed to keep to his script and emphasize the campaign theme. Following a visit to Governor General Jeanne Sauvé's residence on October 1, where he requested that she dissolve Parliament and call a general election in seven weeks' time, the prime minister's maiden speech on the campaign trail aimed to put the Tories' plan, identified by a prior agenda-setting exercise, into action.

"The key question for the electorate will be who can best manage change in the years ahead," Mulroney told reporters, repeating what had emerged from Allan Gregg's research and had been proposed as a major theme for a front-runner's campaign in English Canada.⁶ He announced that the Tories planned "to run on our record of the past and our plan for the future."⁷ His agenda laid bare for all to see, Mulroney immediately set about to diminish the opposition's prime target: himself. As journalist and author Robert Mason Lee explains, "The prime minister was in the process of neutralizing himself. He used the first person just once: 'my colleagues and I.' The rest was all the regal 'we,' the party 'we,' the 'non-I.'"⁸ Like Trudeau before him, Mulroney's strong

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 300.

⁶ Graham Fraser, *Playing For Keeps: The Making Of The Prime Minister, 1988*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), p. 175.

⁷ Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*. (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 81.

⁸ Lee, p. 82.

personality repelled votes as well as attracting them. On balance, polls revealed Canadians believed he was competent and a good, if not lovable, manager. The Progressive Conservatives' preordained strategy was to reinforce the positive aspects of this image on the campaign trail and avoid situations where his less attractive qualities would be magnified.⁹

Implicit in his team-oriented message was its comparison to the state of affairs in the opposition parties. Liberal leader John Turner's leadership ratings were abysmal and his party seemed divided over a number of issues including the free trade agreement and the Meech Lake Accord. NDP leader Ed Broadbent was much more popular personally, but some members of his caucus and a few elements of his party's policy, particularly its fiscal viability, were viewed with skepticism by some voters. Forming an NDP government would, therefore, depend on more than one man's avuncular qualities.¹⁰

The Conservative campaign launch did not go entirely accordingly to plan, however. As Graham Fraser, a journalist at the *Globe and Mail* who would subsequently write Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, noted, a trace of the combative side of the prime minister was evident when reporters scrummed him after he made his opening remarks. CTV reporter Craig Oliver immediately asked why Mulroney had completely ignored free trade in his statement. In fact, Mulroney had devoted a

⁹ Mendelsohn defines priming as "the process through which individuals change opinions not because they alter their beliefs or evaluation of an object, but because they alter the relative weight they give to various considerations that make up the ultimate evaluation," p. 84. The Progressive Conservative agenda-setting strategy – one in which they would try to frame the election's ballot-box question as being about competence – could potentially prime this aspect of leadership. As Mendelsohn suggests, "...In the 1988 election a Liberal identifier might also believe that Brian Mulroney would be a better prime minister than John Turner. Liberal strategists could attempt to persuade such voters to change their evaluation of Mulroney and Turner. Or, they could attempt to prime, by convincing the voter that party identification should be a more important consideration than leadership," p. 84. Matthew Mendelsohn, "The Media's Persuasive Effects: The Priming of Leadership in the 1988 Canadian Election," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 27, no. 1 (March, 1994), pp. 81-97.

¹⁰ Fraser, p. 175.

significant segment of his address to the issue, but only in the French text.¹¹ “During Mulroney’s first mandate, reporters who didn’t understand French often missed substantial elements of Mulroney’s statements, particularly outside the House of Commons where no simultaneous translation was available. At times, this was accidental, but at other times Mulroney chose very carefully which language he would use, knowing that the television networks didn’t like running an interpreter’s voice, or subtitles.”¹² This was probably one of the early instances of the Machiavellian manipulation of message that the shrewd candidate could get away with in the electronic media. Mulroney and his handlers were well aware that although free trade was a divisive issue in parts of English Canada, in francophone areas of Quebec the policy was overwhelmingly accepted.¹³ By using the linguistic dichotomy to his advantage, Mulroney could address an issue to a targeted televised audience and prevent another audience from hearing much about it. The prime minister that day corrected Oliver, but only once the prepared marks were delivered and Mulroney could fob off such questions in the blink-and-you’ll-miss-it style of scrums.

When CBC reporter Wendy Mesley, who was assigned to the Conservative campaign, asked whether Mulroney remained as personally popular as he had been four years earlier, he retorted by asking the reporter what she thought. Mesley asked again, only to be referred to opinion polls the CBC had produced to find her answer. Fraser calls these the “terse, flick-of-the-wrist squash-shot answers that Mulroney habitually gave to scrum questions he didn’t like. Some politicians respond positively to tight, skeptical

¹¹ Quebec was more inclined to support free trade than Ontario. Please see G. Bruce Doern and Brian W. Tomlin, *Faith and Fear: The Free Trade Story*, Toronto: Stoddart, 1991.

¹² Fraser, p. 176.

¹³ *The National*, (Toronto: 10 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

questioning; Mulroney tend[ed] to be terse and uncommunicative. He would respond at greater length only when he could give the answers he wanted.”¹⁴ Sometimes it was better to avoid these tough questions entirely. U.S. President Ronald Reagan, for example, would only answer the questions he liked from reporters as he walked from place to place amongst cheering crowds and pretended he couldn’t hear the ones he preferred to avoid.¹⁵ In a standing scrum, particularly with a reporter like Mesley, who was not afraid to bellow, this strategy wouldn’t work as well. Instead, Mulroney’s handlers opted to remove their leader from this situation as much as possible. As a result, this opening day question and answer session would be the last of its kind for some time.

Turner And Broadbent Play To The Cameras

Without prior knowledge of exactly when the election would be called, neither John Turner nor Ed Broadbent could plan as well-executed launches. However, as word of the dissolution of the government made its way to the opposition camps, both the Liberal and NDP leaders rushed off to “pseudo-events.” “Pseudo events are things that seem to happen but don’t,” author Robert Mason Lee explains. “They are produced for the television cameras and the reporters, who treat the pseudo-event as if it actually occurred.”¹⁶ These made-for-TV moments are another example of how the medium can be used to influence perception. Turner immediately headed for Toronto’s Kensington

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹⁴ Fraser, p. 177.

¹⁵ “Despite presenting a portrait of their boss as a decisive and involved leader, Reagan’s inner circle feared that image would dissolve under the scrutiny of careful investigation. As a result, Reagan’s campaign appearances were as carefully stage-managed as a Hollywood production. Reagan, the star, was handed his lines and coaxed not to wander ‘off-script.’ To guard against unexpected questions from the press, Reagan did not participate in a formal news conference from July to November. Reporters were reduced to shouting questions at the *hard-of-hearing* president above the orchestrated roar of helicopter engines.” American Experience: The Presidents, “Presidential Politics, Ronald Reagan, 40th President,” Available from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/40_reagan/reagan_politics.html, Internet.

¹⁶ Lee, p. 82-83.

Market with his wife to start shaking hands with shoppers and small businesspeople.

Although considered to be the most successful launch by any of the three parties, Fraser notes the gamble to get live television coverage almost didn't pay off because networks had trouble getting the satellite links to work.¹⁷

Later in the day at an official launch at Liberal Party headquarters in Willowdale, optics again played an important role. "The room was packed and hot," Fraser writes, "but full of chanting, cheering candidates and their supporters, giving the campaign a cheery, upbeat note it needed."¹⁸ With the required scenery in place to impress upon home viewers that the Liberals were strong and united, Turner could enter stage left and tell his adoring audience what the now unfolding 50-day production was all about. "This election is primarily about two things," Turner began, attempting to frame the campaign in a manner that would flatter his party's projected strengths. "An independent and sovereign Canada, which has never been so threatened as it is by the Mulroney trade deal, and fairness, particularly for low- and middle-income Canadians who have been hit by Tory tax increases over the last four years. That is why we are going to be saying to Canadians: this is more than an election, this is your future."¹⁹ Although the Liberal leader rattled off about a dozen other issues that would be a part of the campaign, Turner told everyone assembled that more than anything else, the election would be a referendum on Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives' vision for the future.

As important as the visual elements were to Turner's events, his choice of words also bears noting. Although it wasn't explicitly evident at the time, Turner's decision to refer to the Canada-U.S. free trade deal as 'the Mulroney trade deal' would become a

¹⁷ Fraser, p. 199.

¹⁸ Ibid.

substantial factor in subsequent shifts in opinion polls.²⁰ By using a strategy of what we could perhaps call negative, or reverse-priming, and linking an unpopular figure with an issue, the Liberals hoped to imbue the free trade agreement with new meaning; and if Mulroney's popularity declined during the next few weeks, there would be a chance that support for 'his' deal would also erode. Just as Mulroney had attempted to remove his negative image from the electorate's radar in stressing his team in his opening remarks, Turner just as vigorously jockeyed to ensure it was front and centre. This battle over rhetorical control of the agenda would mirror the fight for the right image. Both parties knew that the verbal and visual, together, would be instrumental in shepherding voters.

NDP leader Ed Broadbent also opted for a symbolic backdrop for his opening remarks. Following some pseudo-campaigning for the television cameras in Ottawa's Byward Market,²¹ Broadbent made his way to the National Press Theatre. As Graham Fraser notes, "He had touches of eloquence, but at times seemed a little stiff and awkward. The symbolism was clear [however]; if Mulroney had chosen the silent authority of the Georgian Stones of Rideau Hall to frame his announcement, and Turner the shrill, gaudy enthusiasm of shouting candidates, supporters and bright Liberal signs, Broadbent conveyed a solitary solemnity there alone."²²

The leader immediately told the assembled press corps that "the election is about a fair deal for families, for women, for young people, for our parents, for our grandparents. It's about fairness in taxes, in housing, in job opportunities throughout the country. It is about protecting medicare. It is about cleaning up pollution, and actually

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

²⁰ Lee, p. 13-15.

²¹ Ibid., p. 83.

²² Fraser, p. 218.

doing it. It's about having a government in Canada that we can all be proud of. It's about Canadians making their own decisions about their own future in their country."²³ The quote sounded as if it was lifted right from the pages of the NDP's strategy sessions, and, in truth, it had been. As Julie Mason later told the *Globe and Mail*'s Hugh Winsor, "Ed will be talking a lot about the pressures on family life, about working mothers, about pensions, day care and equality. When the election is fought on these grounds, we win."²⁴ Once again, evidence of agenda-setting (the launch topic), framing (binding favourable issues for the party to the electorate's agenda) and priming (using a popular leader to transmit the message to the mass media, and then to the people) were clearly on display.

Tellingly, although Broadbent did implicitly remind voters that the coming election would have a profound impact on Canadian sovereignty, he did not explicitly mention free trade by name.²⁵ In fact, of all the leaders, only Liberal leader John Turner made it emphatically clear that the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement would be a central issue in the campaign.²⁶ The NDP leader preferred instead to highlight a clear advantage the party strategists had detected – himself. In his statement, Broadbent railed against Conservative leader Brian Mulroney for letting the country down through a succession of scandals, and then proceeded to inform viewers that Turner would have different opinions on the subject every day of the week.²⁷

Broadbent had done what his advisors had asked. He put himself front and centre in the campaign's formative stage and pitched his fine-tuned appeal for a vote for fairness

²³ Ibid., p. 218-219.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

²⁵ Fraser notes it was left to the provincial campaign in BC to put together a press conference to condemn the deal, Ibid., p. 220.

²⁶ Mulroney, as previously noted, preferred to direct his free trade comments to francophone voters predominantly residing in largely pro-free trade Quebec.

²⁷ Fraser, p. 219-220.

for average Canadians. It was now left to the leaders and their parties to relentlessly stick to their chosen message and hope to manipulate the media into passively transmitting that message to the electorate. Each had launched his campaign according to the trajectory identified in pre-election grooming of the issues. But whose agenda would capture public opinion? The ensuing battle for the electorate's attention would be played out on the screens of the nation's televisions. This was to be an election that voters *watched* more than they *read about*.

Who Are You Calling A Conduit?
Televised Media Coverage In The First Weeks Of The Campaign

As a network television reporter on a party leader's tour plane, Keith Boag enjoyed a great deal of popularity as Campaign '88 commenced. Like a quarterback or a trend-setting high school class president, all eyes were on the television reporters who worked for news agencies which drew in large numbers of viewers.²⁸ These men and women were privileged with power that was both revered and feared by campaign teams. Although politicians and strategists could design their tours, events and speeches to suggest what an audience should see, these roving representatives of media authority were the ultimate arbiters.

"They paid a lot of attention to the network reporters on the plane," Boag recalls of the party organizers, noting the agenda-setting capabilities of his job.²⁹ Boag acknowledges that the chief electoral correspondents seemed to have the added benefit of familiarity with the campaign team. These were, in fact, the same people whom they would meet in the halls of Parliament on a daily basis throughout most of the year. Boag

²⁸ Please refer back to "Introduction: Setting the Scene," and the subsection "'Welcome to the Eighties': The changing political climate," for Statistics Canada's ratings analysis.

²⁹ Keith Boag, interview by author, March 13, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

speculates that his newness prompted the Liberal leader's entourage to spend a lot of time trying to figure him out. "That made me a bit of a threat to them because I was an unknown," he offers. "They tried to get to know me better, to figure out what was of interest to me, how smart I was, how much I knew, what I cared about and whether I had a bias to deal with."³⁰ This testimony bolsters the argument that reporters, and particularly television reporters, tended to be cultivated for agenda-setting purposes if they were friendly or pliant, or pegged as troublesome if they did not parrot the strategist's message or if they were immune to spinning techniques.

There were other reasons for treating network television reporters and their crews as if they had checked into a flying five-star hotel. CBC news anchor Peter Mansbridge, who had been in Boag's position during campaigns in the 1970s and early 1980s, explains that the television news media not only gives the party leader's tour essential coverage, but they also bankroll part of the party's campaign. "Their campaign planes were often funded almost totally by the presence of media," he states. "And the largest group on the plane in those days was the television crews because each network had their own crews, producer, camera operator, sound person as well as correspondent. If you start adding that up for three or four networks, you get a lot people who are paying a lot of money for the right to have a seat on the plane."³¹

A producer's need to justify the sheer expense of sending a television crew on a two-month plane trip also factored into the news producers' decision about what went on air each night. "The last campaign I covered on a plane was 1980, and back then you were guaranteed air time every single day," Mansbridge confirms. "You were guaranteed

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Peter Mansbridge, interview by author, April 19, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

your two minutes every day whether something happened or didn't."³² Television thus created its own reality. Elly Alboim, CBC parliamentary bureau chief and senior producer of CBC news specials, notes that even in 1988 the network "had full units on the planes, [it was] paying an enormous amount of money for those seats. So the thought that you wouldn't cover it was very difficult because of the investment."³³ Therefore, despite attempts to provide issue-based reporting on the ground, the electoral horserace that crisscrossed the country for seven weeks in 1988 was always firmly evident in nightly newscasts.³⁴

An examination of CBC's *The National* reveals the bold presence of plane coverage of the campaign.³⁵ Virtually every night the three major party leaders were on

³² Ibid.

³³ Elly Alboim, interview by author, April 10, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

³⁴ For an excellent frame analysis, please refer to: Matthew Mendelsohn, "Television's Frames in the 1988 Canadian Election," *Canadian Journal of Communication [Online]*, 18, no. 2 (January, 1993). Available from: <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=165>. In his conclusion, Mendelsohn suggests his analysis "...revealed four things. First, the campaign was interpreted through the frame of the horserace and secondarily through the frame of leadership. Second, leaders were interpreted through the frame of the horserace. Third, issues, including the FTA, were interpreted through the frame of leadership, credibility, and the horserace, particularly momentum and tactical motivations. And fourth, the Conservatives were successful in having their frames of interpretation applied to the FTA." My only major criticism of this work is that it unfortunately focuses mostly on verbal and not visual and audio aspects of framing, and thereby neglecting an important facet of the medium.

³⁵ Samples from other network newscasts reveal very similar evidence. On *Global News Tonight*, *CTV National News* and Radio-Canada's *Tele-Journal*, coverage tended to mirror *The National*'s line-up with a few notable exceptions. On the private networks, commercials were shown throughout the broadcasts, for example. Also, the French networks included more stories on issues such as the Meech Lake Accord and provincial affairs in Quebec. In general, on all networks, stories which focused on leaders' tours averaged between one-and-a-half to three minutes in length, with most stories clocking in at two or two-and-a-quarter minutes. The delineation of subject matter was also generally comparable. In a Carleton University study conducted immediately following the election, researchers timed and coded nightly news coverage on the three major English networks: CBC, CTV, and Global. Their study found each leader was the focus of roughly 20 per cent of the newscasts' coverage. See Frizell and others, p. 84. Furthermore, in Matthew Mendelsohn, "The Media's Persuasive Effects: The Priming of Leadership in the 1988 Canadian Election. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 27, no. 1 (March, 1994), pp. 81-97, the author notes "the concept of cumulative effects suggests that the precise context of the seen or read may be less important than the very fact that an individual is exposed to the media. The media present very similar pictures of the campaign day after day and newswriters organize their reports into a fairly consistent narrative. Whether individuals watched CBC or CTV on Monday or Tuesday is less important than the fact that they watched: over a period of time, individuals who are exposing themselves to mass media news coverage will be exposed to basically the same kind of coverage even if they are not seeing exactly the same stories," p. 84.

tour, stories filed by reporters embedded with the traveling national campaign team made it to air.³⁶ In fact, on days when leaders opted to ground their tours to celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving, prepare for the leaders' debates, or take a day or two to rest, Mansbridge, or whoever else was reading the news that night, would explain to viewers why they weren't seeing a story about the party leader's tour.³⁷ Each of these stories would usually receive approximately one-and-a-half to three minutes of airtime each evening on the programme and more often than not, the stories from fuselage journalists would be grouped together and appear at or near the top of the broadcast.³⁸ With three of these stories almost every night at a total length of about five to nine minutes or more, out of a 22-minute broadcast, it becomes abundantly clear that viewers were exposed to a substantial amount of leadership and personality-based coverage during the campaign. When combined with issues-based pieces concerning leaders and televised debates and advertising punctuating the newscast which featured party leaders, a strong case can be made for the media's, and particularly the televised media's, priming effect on the leadership issue in this campaign.³⁹

Alboim suggests the great attention that media lavished on party leaders is based on more than simple financial concerns. Part of the reason for the extensive investment in plane coverage is its entertaining nature. "I think it is a willful decision by media

³⁶ It should also be noted that campaigns scheduled announcements with an eye to the news. For example, a major national announcement for the evening news would most likely be timed to make the first nightly newscasts in the East. Moving westward, later time zones permitted the networks to rerun their earlier stories.

³⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 10 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

³⁸ Refer to Appendix II.

³⁹ See Matthew Mendelsohn's "The Media's Persuasive Effects: The Priming of Leadership in the 1988 Canadian Election," pp. 81-97, and "The Media and Interpersonal Communications: The Priming of Issues, Leaders, and Party Identification," *The Journal of Politics*, 58, no. 1, (February, 1996), pp. 112-125. Both articles use the 1988 Canadian National Election Study for statistical purposes.

organizations and reporters to move towards leaders because personification of the news is inherently more interesting to people,” he hypothesizes. “And in a world of ruthless journalistic opposition and where people despise politicians and news about politics is not very prized, news organizations are trying to reshape coverage of election campaigns to something inherently interesting. So even more than in the past they’re turning it into an athletic contest because that’s the only metaphor they think will appeal to a mass audience. And any athletic contest will have its champions.”⁴⁰ The “man-in-motion” nature of fuselage journalism caught and held the broad audience’s attention much more than any static analysis of policy.

The crucial challenge for the leaders’ handlers was to make their champion appealing to viewers – to connect on an emotional and personal level. As U.S. media analyst Joshua Meyrowitz notes, “Recent polls show that many people will [still] vote for a candidate they disagree with on the issues because they say they like the candidate personally. This dichotomy of response to personality and stands on the issues makes sense only in a television culture. If we read a candidate’s speeches in a newspaper, it would be insane for us to say, ‘This is all nonsense, but you know something, I like the guy.’ Such a reaction only makes sense when we feel we have met and ‘know’ our leaders personally. And television gives us that feeling.”⁴¹ Meyrowitz’s deduction and Alboim’s affirmation offer some explanation as to why the leaders’ tours were broadcast to the extent they were and why each party planned them in such great detail. A natural synergy emerged between politicians and the media: each realized that television enhanced public reaction to their craft.

⁴⁰ Alboim interview.

⁴¹ Frizell and others. p. 78.

Television reporters assigned to the task were not content to be passive information conduits, however. Their objective was to get behind the hype of fight night and bring their viewers a meaningful explanation of what they should be looking for. In this sense, while being mindful of the glowing reviews the promoters gave their champions, and the strong words and posturing coming from the “athletes” themselves, television reporters looked at the match-up with a critical eye, and were aware of weaknesses, bluffing and evidence of poor preparation. The strategists on the campaigns might do their best to obfuscate, yet each reporter would tackle his or her target in a different manner – some with greater tenacity than others.

Brian Mulroney: A View From Afar

The CBC’s Wendy Mesley, a television reporter following the prime minister’s campaign, had potentially the most difficult assignment of them all. She was charged with examining a man who had led the government for the past four years and was now asking for a new mandate. He had a record to defend, but his advisers were keen to go on the offensive and minimize their champion’s interaction with the media. Mulroney was given a script and there was no room for improvisation; he was told to smile for the cameras, stay behind the velvet rope, look prime ministerial and come across as a leader who could manage change. Like Trudeau in 1980, the Tory strategists wanted to low-bridge their man, and they intended to use every means at their disposal to keep the media from cornering him in an unflattering moment.

On October 3 Mesley’s nightly spot for *The National* opened with a camera shot of supporters holding homemade signs and chanting “four more years,” in Ottawa. One sign to get a close-up proclaimed “Brian Mulroney is the future.” After a cameraman of a

large crowd, Mesley's voice-over exclaimed: "What a send off! Well-wishers at the airport, a clear sky, and best of all for Brian Mulroney a new Gallop poll."⁴² The reporter explained the poll showed both Mulroney and his party were popular with Canadians, and his first trip to southern Ontario was to build support in the sole region of the country where the Tories were still trailing the Grits. In the riding of Halton-Peel, where Mulroney visited a manufacturing plant, Mesley asked a worker if he thought free trade will help or hurt the plant. The worker said he believed it would help because 95 per cent of the parts they make go abroad.⁴³ The visit to the plant, and the rapturous reception he received, fit nicely with the Conservatives' plan to portray their leader as someone who could sustain a growing economy and manage future change. Although Mesley specifically mentioned free trade, an issue the Tories tried to downplay, the camera shots all pointed to a pleasant and industrious business where people were delighted about future prospects. Score one for the promoter. The carefully planned script was followed to a tee, the campaign theme – competently managing change – was illustrated, and the tour event's engaging visual elements helped to make it the top story on the CBC evening news.

Perhaps frustrated by the party's success in controlling the message, Mesley made a special point of referring to the tight security which prevented most people from getting close enough to the leader to spot any cracks in the façade. "Party officials had access to the Tory leader but reporters didn't," she explained. At a campaign event in London, Ontario that night, Mesley noted the prime minister's handlers took the unusual step of

⁴² *The National*, (Toronto: 3 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁴³ Ibid.

restricting the media to one corner.⁴⁴ As footage of the cordoned-off media watching the action from behind a chain linked fence was played for her audience, Mesley suggested that “Mulroney is back on top of the polls and he wants to stay there. And he seems to think that avoiding the media will help him do that.”⁴⁵

The following night, Mesley’s crew only offered shots of Mulroney’s tour of another factory, this time outside Calgary. In the footage, which was assembled in a script-and-clip package for the anchor to read, Mulroney is shown reminding his captive audience that he dismantled the much-despised National Energy Program (NEP).⁴⁶ The owner of the factory explains to the camera that since the NEP was dumped, his business has turned around and is improving. Finally, to cap off a successful day, *The National*’s viewers were treated to shots of the prime minister receiving applause and a standing ovation from an audience attending a conference for exporters. Mulroney triumphantly reminded the crowd from his podium that even more prosperity will come with the new free trade deal.⁴⁷ Here again, the Conservative strategy to showcase the prime minister’s favourable attributes to home viewers was executed flawlessly.

By October 5, Mesley’s suspicions that a critical exploration of the Tory campaign was not welcome appeared to be confirmed. In his introduction to Mesley’s report, Mansbridge suggested that “in contrast to the other two parties, the Conservatives didn’t have a major policy statement today, but that’s hardly surprising. The Conservatives are more interested in defending their record than coming up with new announcements. That means there’s a certain sameness to Brian Mulroney’s campaign

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *The National*, (Toronto: 4 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

day after day.”⁴⁸ The CBC’s nightly summary of the campaign on October 5 opened with a clip of Mulroney talking to lumber mill official as logs are processed, noticeably separated from the reporters who are trying to tag. In an almost exasperated tone, Mesley explained that it’s “day three on the road, and again it’s the same routine.”⁴⁹ She informed the audience that the day usually begins with a photo opportunity. On that day the media were shepherded to the mill where they were supposed to take pictures of the Conservative leader in a hard hat visiting a business that hoped to benefit under free trade. “Mulroney’s handlers make sure the camera crews get lots of pretty pictures, but they stop them and the reporters from getting close to the leader,” Mesley elaborated. “It’s a heavily controlled event. Unlike the other leaders, Mulroney hasn’t done any radio hotline shows – nothing yet that would expose him to any opposing views.”⁵⁰ In effect, the news media, as represented here by Mesley, took on the role of exposing agenda-setting priorities of politicians.

The second verse was the same as the first. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce in Prince George, British Columbia, another group that supported free trade, the media was meant to take a clip of Mulroney at a podium extolling the virtues of the agreement. The final stop of the day was at a campaign rally in Red Deer, Alberta. “Organizers had a string of Girl Guides and Brownies out to meet Mulroney,” Mesley revealed. “They were kept waiting for two-and-a-half hours, but the organizers got the pictures they were hoping for.” The camera picked up the desired clip of Mulroney

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 5 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

meeting the young girls and telling them “you all look so pretty.”⁵¹ The only time a less restrained, less controlled prime minister was on display was in front of a partisan crowd during a campaign rally; yet, as the CBC reporter contended, the timing made it difficult for the networks to get Mulroney on the news, and for newspaper reporters to file in time for their deadline.⁵² In essence, in tailoring their campaign to the television media’s schedule, the strategists were not only able to schedule events that exemplified and furthered their agenda for national television audiences, they were also ensuring moments designed specifically for a partisan crowd were essentially off-limits. Although they were not explicitly banned from such events, there would be little chance any footage could be broadcast the night of the event, and the pressure to bring viewers the latest news would likely prevent the footage from appearing the following day. Agenda-setting was becoming a game which each side of the political-media divide sought to play to its best advantage.

The Tory campaign team appeared to make little effort to hide the manufactured, pre-planned photo-opportunities on the tour, or chain-link fence used to keep the critical capability of the cameras’ lenses from capturing an unflattering scene. With some members of the media in open revolt and turning the cameras on themselves to report their constraints, one might be tempted to suggest the Conservative plan was a bust. Not so, say some strategists, and even more surprisingly some reporters. David Halton, the CBC’s chief political correspondent in Ottawa during the 1988 campaign, explains although the news media might protest this shameless force-feeding of images in their on-air reports, ultimately the loudness of a good image drowns out critical words.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

When deconstructing the image for home viewers “to some degree in television you’re fighting a battle between the image and what the reporter says,”⁵³ Halton has commented. The reporter, more often than not, comes out on the losing end. “We may point out that an audience might be partisan and not necessarily meeting with the general public,” he says. “You try to point out some of the stagecraft involved whenever it was relevant to do that; [but in the end] the image or impression is ultimately more important than what the reporter is saying.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the medium does appear to be the message. Halton relates a famous example of this battle emanating from south of the 49th parallel. President Ronald Reagan’s handlers mercilessly created photo opportunities for their champion in the early 1980s, and after a while it began to irritate some television reporters who felt they were being used. Reporter Leslie Stahl prepared a biting story where she strung together a number of these pre-packaged nuggets for the eyes and quite critically pulled back the curtain to reveal the crass purpose behind these images and what Republican strategists wanted to accomplish. Stahl was stunned when she received a call from Reagan’s staff thanking her for showing so many flattering pictures. Reagan’s people said “that’s all people will remember, they wouldn’t remember what was said.”⁵⁵

Mansbridge explains that Canadian campaign teams also adhered to the old ethos that a picture is worth a thousand words, and a moving picture is priceless. “Campaign strategists believe, quite rightly, that the picture is the most important thing and it almost doesn’t matter what the reporter is saying,” he notes. “If the picture of their leader looks good, then they’ve accomplished their day. It sounds pretty basic and blunt, but that’s the truth. That’s basically what happened in campaigns in the early part of the television

⁵³ David Halton, interview by author, April 24 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

age.”⁵⁶

Unfortunately, the CBC anchor says he and his colleagues were partially to blame for fostering an environment where pre-packaged image-based messages could regularly infiltrate newscasts. “I was a reporter on the plane in the 1970s and early 80s [and] we never fought back. Television and electronic media was still coming of age and we were more focused on that then arguing about media manipulation. But by ’88 things started to turn around and now you see a very different type of coverage of campaigns. In 1988 it was still the situation very much where the parties were dictating the day to you in terms of what was available to see.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Mansbridge suggests television reporters did sometimes veer off the carefully planned course the strategists had presented. “When I say we were being used, I don’t mean that we never tried to do our own story,” he adds. “It’s not like we took a press release and put it over pictures. Even today you still deal with the ebb and the flow of the campaign. It’s just that in those days there was a lot more focus on the planes then there is now.”⁵⁸

When forces conspired to reveal competing messages, media organizations that had been spoon-fed carefully-portioned campaign pabulum were quick to report contradictions. For example, on October 7, 1988, *The National*’s guest anchor Knowlton Nash reported that “the Conservative election campaign, which has been nothing if not careful, suddenly found itself coping with controversy today. Two Conservatives said some things the opposition jumped all over.”⁵⁹ In the newscast’s top story, reporter Karen Webb spelled out “gift number one: tax reform.” Webb noted the government had always

⁵⁵ Ibid., Author Graham Fraser also seized upon this point, Fraser, p. 308-309.

⁵⁶ Mansbridge interview.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

said its new tax reform system would be revenue neutral, but finance committee chairman and Conservative candidate Don Blenkarn was quoted as saying the proposed federal sales tax could generate an extra \$10 billion for the government.⁶⁰ The usual shots of the prime minister in busy settings were replaced by clarifying comments from Finance Minister Michael Wilson, back-peddling from Blenkarn, and vitriol from NDP leader Ed Broadbent, who accused the government of making “average Canadians” pay more in taxes.⁶¹

Even more unsettling for the Tory marketing team was “gift number two” for the opposition parties: housing policy. Webb explained to viewers that “Conservative housing Minister John McDermid, three weeks into his first cabinet job, said there wasn’t a problem with homelessness in this country because last year, on the coldest day of the year in Toronto, the shelters weren’t full.”⁶² In a sequence of edits that plainly laid out the minister’s folly, McDermid is shown in his well-manicured executive office telling a reporter that he has “been informed that the shelter system is fairly adequate in the country; that we can put people up on a temporary basis overnight.”⁶³ Immediately Webb’s story cut to a shot of person at food bank in Toronto. She noted that “in the tightest housing market in the country, where thousands of families feed their kids from the food bank because they’ve used all their money to pay the rent, housing activists thought the minister didn’t quite understand the problem.”⁶⁴ Bill Bosworth, a spokesperson for the Election Agenda for Housing said he doubted “Mr. McDermid has

⁵⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 7 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ It must be said that Broadbent’s comment nicely fit his own campaign’s theme.

⁶² *The National*, (Toronto: 7 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

actually been in a shelter, because if he had been, he would understand why they're empty. They're deplorable places to live. People will choose to live on the streets rather than live in some of the shelters. But that doesn't mean they don't need a decent place to live."⁶⁵

The off-message comments, combined with a damning editing sequence, made Liberal leader John Turner's response all the more potent. "We have a new Minister of Homelessness and that is the reflection of the Tory philosophy, the Mulroney philosophy of how we take care of those in Canada, who are not able, through no fault of their own, to protect themselves,"⁶⁶ Turner contended. He couched his rhetoric with the campaign theme his party had developed weeks earlier. The Liberals would be the protectors of the weak and defenseless and fight against irresponsible and heartless Conservative policy. A report by Mesley from the leader's tour noted the Mulroney attempted to stay on his chosen message of the day – childcare – but the controversies and mounting protests by anti-free trade groups who followed him into the cities did distract. The day was the first of the campaign to throw a curve to the Conservatives' agenda-setting plan and showed the kind of tight, collective discipline that was needed to make agenda-setting work. The question now was whether the party would be able to get back onto the road to victory and into the groove of their preferred campaign.

The Conservatives answered resoundingly in the affirmative. The following day in a trip to his home riding of Manicouagan, whose voters had a testy relationship with the most powerful MP they had ever had, Mulroney was shown surrounded by a crowd of

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid

supporters wishing him well.⁶⁷ On October 9 he stood in front of his Quebec candidates at a massive rally. Mesley called it “the glitziest event of the tour. A university lecture hall turned into a discotheque. Laser beams shot out the party logo to the beat of their new campaign song for Quebec.”⁶⁸ Mulroney had returned to the nightly news surrounded by admirers and was seen to be promoting his strong “team;” however, unplanned disruptions once again diverted the flow of his campaign. On October 12, Mulroney made another defense of his free trade agreement at a local interview. As Mesley reported, “It was all routine; routine until tonight. A Conservative rally was disrupted by protesters.”⁶⁹ Protesters, cordoned off by fencing, chanted “traitor,” and held signs that read “Free Canada, Trade Mulroney.” Later at a rally, his speech was disrupted by a group of 20 young peace advocates angry about his plan to buy nuclear submarines. The reporter explained that the protest didn’t last long, as “they were quickly dragged out by Mulroney’s handlers.” Mesley noted “it’s not the first time he has been heckled, he has preached tolerance; however, it is the first time his handlers have moved so quickly to bring them away.”⁷⁰ For a governing party, being seen to be quashing dissent did not flatter its good management style. With visuals such as these becoming obstacles in the way of a clear message, the Conservatives tightened security at rallies to reduce their incidence.

Nonetheless, these types of bumps on the road were relatively minor during the first half of the election campaign. The Conservative leader was generally able to follow

⁶⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 8 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁶⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 9 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁶⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 12 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

his script, garner fair or positive coverage and reinforce his party's chosen theme. The message was unmistakable: Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives were managing change, capably handling their own rough spots on the campaign trail and were undoubtedly the party to beat. The front-runner's title was borne out by polls which consistently placed the Conservatives above the other two parties.⁷¹ As much as the other parties may have argued to the contrary, the election appeared to be fought on the Conservatives' own terms. Agenda-setting appeared to be working for the Tories.

John Turner: Forces Conspire Against An Already Troubled Leader

Of all the leaders and parties contesting the 1988 federal election, television posed the utmost problems for John Turner. The Liberal leader had squandered a sizeable lead in the public opinion polls in 1984 and led his troops to a bitter defeat. Negative television coverage and a poorly designed campaign plan appeared to have been major factors in his loss, and Turner was determined to improve upon his bum-patting, back-slapping, "had no option" performance.⁷²

Accused of having no detailed policy to defend in the previous election, Turner wanted to remove this weakness as soon as he possibly could in 1988. Therefore, days before an expected election call, he released a 40 point manifesto on September 28. The pain-staking detail in which each of the policy areas had been explained was due in part to the manner in which the manifesto was constructed. The party's grassroots membership had had a large hand in the policy formulation through regional meetings, conventions and ad hoc committees. No one could claim the Liberals did not have a plan of action this time. But there were new problems to deal with. As political scientist

⁷¹ Please refer to Appendix IV.

⁷² For a brief review of Turner's campaign horriblus, see Fraser, p. 80-83.

Stephen Clarkson noted, “The electric media, which have trouble transmitting more than a single idea in a 30-second clip, could not cope with such a cornucopia of ideas that had not been pre-digested into a simple theme wrapped around a few easily grasped issues.”⁷³

More ominously, the package did not have a price tag attached. Although the party promised the cost of each item would be spelled out during the campaign, the opposition parties could distract from the main message by continuously questioning how much it would all cost and applying their own numbers as they saw fit.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, with a solid document on which to campaign, Liberal candidates were ready to answer virtually any question that came their way at the door step. Graham Fraser quotes Russell MacLellan, Liberal MP for Cape Breton-The Sydneys, as saying “It was a terrific morale booster. You can only go on for so long saying ‘We’re ready, we’re ready’ – this was proof.”⁷⁵

With the question of substance now answered, Turner could focus on erasing the memories of the bumbling politician television viewers may have remembered from his first campaign as leader. On October 3, CBC reporter Keith Boag suggested “Turner looked completely at ease [at the day’s first campaign event], taking questions from Ottawa high school students. Turner likes this format, it gives him an opportunity to show his grip on the issues people want to talk about. Perhaps more importantly, he can also show that he has become a smoother politician than he was in 1984.”⁷⁶ The following day, the Liberal leader began expanding on a particular part of his party’s 40 point plan: housing. Boag called it “one of their most important policies of the election campaign,”

⁷³ Frizzell and others, p. 33.

⁷⁴ Fraser, p. 171.

⁷⁵ Fraser, p. 171-172.

⁷⁶ *The National*, (Toronto: 3 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

and he noted “the Liberals had their leader in the kind of environment they considered just right for fleshing out the housing policy: surrounded by supporters, tucked in amongst the high rises of Toronto, a city in the midst of a housing crisis.”⁷⁷

The housing story is one of a handful Boag remembers almost 20 years later, and he says he remembers it because he wished he could have done more like it. Although the Liberal party succeeded in getting their leader talking about an issue which spoke to “Liberal values of caring, sharing and building,” in a desired setting, Boag says it also allowed him to examine an issue of substance. “What I find in election campaigns is that early on in the campaign you have an opportunity to deal with policy in a straightforward, straight-up manner, to actually tell people what it is a party is offering them that distinguishes them from the other choices out there and give them information to make a decision,” he explains. “As it goes on, it gets to the point very quickly where it turns into a horse race. And by the end of the campaign it’s nothing but horse race. And when I say I wish we could have done more stories like that one, it’s because I think we have a responsibility that we don’t live up to, to actually inform voters what the choices they have are. I am actually quite proud of that story because there is little of me in it and very little attitude.”⁷⁸ In fact, the story which followed on *The National* that night featured a business reporter offering an additional evaluation of the story.⁷⁹

The complimentary analysis of the tour item’s forthright message is exemplary of how both journalistic and partisan needs can be met. Unfortunately for Turner and his party, this symbiotic relationship only serves both parties when conditions are optimal –

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁷⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 4 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁷⁸ Keith Boag interview

often, as Boag suggested, at the pristine opening of a campaign. The very next day, Mansbridge told viewers “the Liberals laid out [another] majority campaign promise. John Turner was in Montreal to promise to provide high quality affordable childcare for every family that needs it. But... the details came out a little garbled.”⁸⁰ Boag’s story began with the type of shots the Liberal strategists were undoubtedly imagining when they conceived a showcase for the party’s childcare policy and an opportunity to frame a significant issue for the Liberals. At a Montreal day care centre, Turner was shown introducing himself to a little boy. Turner asked the toddler what his name was, and the child in turn asks the Liberal leader what his name is. “As usual the Liberals made sure they had their leader in an appropriate setting to talk about his child care policy,” Boag intoned. “Before making the official policy announcement Turner and his aides took the media on tours of two separate child care centres.”⁸¹ The day’s events clearly called for ample opportunity to feed the beast – in this case primarily television news, but to a lesser degree print photographers – followed by a more substantive announcement that would become the icing to the morning’s cake. Furthermore, the scene expressed the Liberal theme of protecting those who cannot protect themselves, advancing their own campaign agenda. Turner and his handlers were thus beginning to find a chink in the Tories’ agenda-setting strategy. Well-orchestrated stories rooted in substance could win the day over the agenda-setting auto pilot.

Turner promised to triple the current number of licensed childcare spaces in the country over the next seven years; but Boag noted the Liberals believed they could do

⁷⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 4 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁸⁰ *The National*, (Toronto: 5 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

twice as much as the Conservatives had planned with the same amount of money.⁸² As if that math were not difficult enough to swallow, the party also faced questions about a plan to convert the existing childcare expense deduction to a tax credit. When he was asked what the commitment meant in terms of real dollars to real people, Turner admitted he didn't know. An attempt to fob off the question to Status of Women critic Lucie Pepin, also failed as she said an exact dollar amount hadn't been set. Perhaps even more devastating was Turner's reaction, caught by cameras, as he sat as a member of a panel listening to Pepin. Turner looked visibly upset and grimaced as the CBC's camera panned in for a close up.⁸³ Later attempts by reporters to learn the exact amount of the tax credit provided even more footage that reflected poorly on the party. When finance critic Raymond Garneau was asked to clarify Pepin's statements, he walked away from the camera.⁸⁴ What began as a promising piece of electronic one-upmanship for viewers at home became a painful spectacle of ineptitude, confusion, division and contempt. Unlike Mulroney, who kept smiling and waving when confronted with hecklers or problematic statements from candidates, Turner's look of concern and frustration was amplified for the electorate at large.⁸⁵

"The childcare announcement became a much bigger story than it might have been when it came to be interpreted as a metaphor for the whole campaign," Boag recalls, adding that the groundwork for the disastrous story was laid days earlier. "What happened there, as I recall it was that Chantal Hébert, who at that time was working for CBC Radio (French) [and who] was a mother and a very bright woman, as I think most

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

people have come to understand, discovered that the childcare policy didn't match up from her own experience. She was the one who drove that story. There were some problems with it as one of the advisors for the issue didn't know as much as she did. So just that dynamic going on in the press core traveling with them took on a life of its own."⁸⁶ At the press conference when they saw Turner and Pepin did not see the platform in the same way, the story became obvious. "That, I think, is an example of how a [journalistic pack mentality] works when it works well... There's a good side to a pack too. A pack has a collective intelligence that an individual doesn't. That's what you saw there when an individual such as Chantal Hébert is tipping the press corps as to where a story could be so that when the news conference happened, everyone had questions that were really designed to probe how much that party knew about the policy itself."⁸⁷

To compound matters, Turner spent the next few day side-stepping reporters' questions about the cost and prolonging the story on the nightly news. Rather than putting the issue to rest and reasserting the party's theme through subsequent appearances, Turner's stalling tactics preempted a return to the non-offensive tour of photo-opportunities. In effect, Turner had engaged in a piece of negative agenda-setting; he had raised an issue but had failed to analytically serve its implication and therefore paid a continuing price for his ineptitude. Moreover, unlike Mulroney, whose distance from the media inoculated him from answering probing questions, Turner's open-access strategy – one an underdog uses perennially – kept the spotlight squarely on him and microphones and cameras pushed to his face.

⁸⁵ Goldfarb polling for the party showed the botched policy announcement "had further stained the image of competence the Liberals had tried to project." Fraser, p. 236.

⁸⁶ Boag interview.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

To illustrate, on October 8, a full three days after the brouhaha began, Turner was supposed to talk about his party's multiculturalism strategy. Instead, his refusal to answer questions about the botched childcare announcement was made to be the story of the day.

⁸⁸ When Boag filed his nightly report, only a brief series of clips featuring Turner meeting some of Toronto's multicultural communities was utilized. Most of the clips consisted of Patrick Johnston, co-chairman of the party's national platform committee, trying to clear up the child care policy confusion by providing a cost breakdown. Although recycled images of Turner with children in a daycare were used, they were intersected by defensive answers from Johnson and clips of Turner avoiding reporters. As Boag concluded, "The confusion over the daycare policy is the most damaging story the Liberals have had to face so far in the campaign. And Turner's refusal to talk about it today, even though he said he would, means the story will continue."⁸⁹

The problems for the Liberals persisted on October 10. As Mansbridge told his audience, "On this Thanksgiving Monday John Turner was the only national leader to campaign, tonight he may be thankful that the day is over. [On October 9] the Conservatives kicked off their Quebec campaign with a show of enthusiasm and confidence. Today the Liberals moved into Montreal to try to do the same thing. They couldn't... The Liberals wanted to tackle the Conservatives, but spent a lot of time attacking each other."⁹⁰ On a day when Turner wanted to stress unity and a strong team, television reporters were treated to a spectacle of internal party warfare. Following a preview of the party's Quebec campaign song and the trotting out of the Liberals' star

⁸⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 8 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *The National*, (Toronto: 10 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

candidates, Boag's report showed footage of angry party faithful at the door trying to get into the rally. "These Liberals showed up to disrupt the rally, to embarrass their party," he suggested, as images of the struggle flashed by. "They're angry because they say party bosses aren't allowing them to pick the candidate they want in the Montreal riding of St. Laurent. William Dery wanted the nomination and says the party fixed things so he didn't get it."⁹¹

As Boag detailed the pushing and shoving between those for Dery and those against him, he prepared viewers for Turner's "splashy entrance." Although the reporter noted that at the end of his speech Turner "got a thunderous ovation... William Dery's supporters could not be drowned out."⁹² As if to pour salt in Turner's wounds, Boag noted the Liberal leader "has now made two trips into Quebec since the campaign began and each has been marred by an embarrassing turn of events. Last week it was the confusion over the party's own childcare policy. Today it was the very public display of division within the party at a time when party unity is crucial."⁹³ Only briefly, at the very end of the piece, does Boag strike a positive note, closing with footage from a rally in New Brunswick that evening. "He was back to the themes which have characterized the campaign outside of Quebec; back to talking about his platform, and against free trade," the reporter stated.⁹⁴

For viewers at home, the addendum may have been too little, too late. The *image du jour* for the Turner campaign was of the angry protesters from his own party and the action perfectly suited television's demands for spontaneity, conflict and drama. Once

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

again, the Liberals' planned agenda had been obscured by other internal forces – their disunity and ineptitude – and amplified by the television medium's ability to bring the immediacy and emotion of an event to millions of viewers who are hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometers away. The Montreal protest, like the earlier childcare squabbles, had become a visual metaphor or frame for the ever-growing problem of disunity in the Liberal campaign. Neither the party nor the media could have planned this narrative, but the agenda on which the Liberals had wanted to fight the election had been hijacked by the made-for-TV movie that was unraveling in the early days of the campaign. And unfortunately for the Liberals, it would get worse before it got better. A popular premier, Frank McKenna of New Brunswick, opposed Turner on the issue of free trade,⁹⁵ a book that was critical of his style was released by senior Liberal Party members,⁹⁶ and polls showed the party was now fighting a losing battle for second place.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, when Turner found a message with which he was comfortable and a receptive audience, he was more than capable of putting on a good show. On October 11, at a stop in Cape Breton, a place Liberals described as their "heaven,"⁹⁸ Turner used an attack on free trade to energize his supporters. Boag reported that "John Turner was warmly welcomed and in return he threw away his prepared speech and launched into one of his most rousing attacks on Brian Mulroney and the free trade deal."⁹⁹ Alluding to a theme of subservience that would later be used to great effect in a Liberal television

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁹⁶ *The National*, (Toronto: 12 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁹⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 17 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁹⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

commercial, Turner told the rally that “Reagan said, Mulroney I want you to dismantle the national energy program. [And Mulroney answered] Yes sir Mr. President.”¹⁰⁰ With a salute to punctuate the statement and crystallize the image, the Liberal leader basked in the applause he had earned. The problem appeared to be a difference between the message Turner wanted to present and the one the party was asking him to promote. In fact, reporters like Boag repeatedly mentioned in their reports that Turner seemed to be most at ease when he ignored his prepared remarks and delivered a patriotic, anti-free trade stump speech. If the party and the leader were ever in tune, it would be a powerful message. Until that time, the discordant strategy and reality was jarring. In essence, the 1988 campaign was a contest between a disciplined, programmed leader with a preordained message (Mulroney) and an old-style politico who wanted to go with his gut reaction (Turner).

Ed Broadbent: All About Ed, All The Time

By 1988, NDP leader Ed Broadbent could rightly claim to be a veteran campaigner. Having led his party through three previous federal elections, Broadbent was comfortable in his own skin and had enough past experience to avoid freshman follies. His party was also well prepared to entice positive media coverage, especially from the television networks. Co-national campaign director Robin Sears said his team tried to gear at least one event towards television every day of the campaign. “It had to have some visual hook,” he says, looking back. “It had to be something that would ‘make nice pictures’ as it were. Every day one tries to present an item, some content, a location and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

event in pictures that would grab television producers.”¹⁰¹ When these stunts worked well, there was no telling how much publicity could be gleaned from them. In the 1980 campaign, for example, Sears remembers Broadbent and his wife Lucille being filmed in a northern riding wearing bearskin parkas and participating in a dogsled race. Broadbent says the event provided such stunning images that even television networks beyond Canada’s borders picked them up. All the news media ran clips of the race because it was a winter campaign, Broadbent recalls. The pictures went all over Europe and it confirmed all the stereotypes about life in Canada. When he next met friends involved in the socialist movement in Germany they were all joking about it, he laughs.¹⁰²

Of course, an incident that might have won over the few ex-patriot voters in Germany was fine, but a message aimed squarely at the NDP’s targeted “average Canadians” was even better, and the party had just the setting for such a message. Broadbent says he remembers proposing the party launch its campaign in the lobby of a downtown Toronto office tower to show the symbolic differences between his party and its two major competitors.¹⁰³ Sears says the visuals were perfect for reinforcing the dominate message of the campaign. “In ’88 we did a huge [photo opportunity] in the Atrium of the Toronto Dominion Centre to make a statement about the differences between Main Street and Bay Street’s views of free trade and who would be the beneficiaries.”¹⁰⁴ It was a perfect dichotomy for an electronic age. While the dogsledding might have been more enjoyable, the optics of the NDP were particularly sentient and

¹⁰¹ Robin Sears, interview by author, March 24, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹⁰² The Hon. Edward Broadbent, interview by author, May 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sears interview.

achieved the goal of “[connecting] the content and the pictures”¹⁰⁵ to enhance the agenda. Sears says he believes the Atrium launch, and most other media events were quite successful. “I think the number of times it wasn’t successful would be when reporters drew attention to the lack of there being such a connection or not covering the item at all. By virtue of the fact one got a clip on TV on every newscast of every network every night that was the condition or price of entry for most of them.”¹⁰⁶

On most nights, network news coverage of the leader’s tour would give special consideration to events which contained these types of engaging backgrounds and clips. For example, if the NDP wanted to draw attention to the argument that the free trade deal would threaten medicare, it would be all the more appealing to television cameras if their leader made that statement while visiting a senior’s home.¹⁰⁷ When outlining the party’s environmental policy, Broadbent made his way to a polluted wharf in Richmond British Columbia and the site of a PCB fire in Quebec.¹⁰⁸ Anna Maria Tremonti, covering the NDP leader’s campaign even noted that “Ed Broadbent wandered among the toddlers in a combined grade school and daycare centre today, a television backdrop for his new policy.”¹⁰⁹ In another report, she focused her crew’s camera on pianist Anton Querti, an NDP candidate from Toronto, tickling the ivories as he “set the mood for an announcement on NDP cultural policies.”¹¹⁰ All of the above are the NDP attempted to frame issues and the campaign as a whole.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 4 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹⁰⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 5 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹⁰⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 12 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹¹⁰ *The National*, (Toronto: 17 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

On October 7, *The National*'s replacement anchor Knowlton Nash told viewers that "there was nothing subtle about where Broadbent chose to outline his ethics in government policy. He was in the Ontario riding that used to be held by Sinclair Stevens [a disgraced former cabinet minister]."¹¹¹ Simply being in a symbolic or interesting locale to make a speech or answer questions might pique the interest of television producers and garner some air time, but a truly effective clip offered even more to a viewer. At Broadbent's ethics announcement, for example, when he was asked to set an example and make his own holdings public, the NDP leader laughed and pulled out a matchbook on which to detail his "extensive" property holdings.¹¹² That clip, in which Broadbent says he owns a house in Ottawa, a cottage and a 1984 GM car, and nothing else, was a textbook piece of television theatre that easily made it to the country's TV screens. All of these events were designed to seduce television cameras, but, as Sears confirms, the most successful matched an image with content, and fit into the broader campaign theme, further promoting the desired "Main Street" agenda and framing a ballot-box question. By showing the electorate that he only had a few major possessions, Broadbent once again underscored his connection to 'average' and 'ordinary' voters. The less-than-subtle message: a Bay Street lawyer like Turner or a big-spending man like Mulroney would need more than just the back of a matchbook to disclose their property; they would need at least a couple of sheets of foolscap.

*Shining A Light In A Dark Corner:
The CBC Exposes An Attempted Liberal Leadership Coup*

Although the CBC and the private television networks did produce analysis

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹¹¹ *The National*, (Toronto: 7 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada,

Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

pieces, issues-based reporting and stories on local or regional campaigns, the first three weeks of the 1988 campaign had focused to a great extent on the reports from the leaders' planes. From October 3 to October 17, slightly less than 50 per cent of all the time spent reporting on the election campaign on *The National* was devoted to the leaders' tours or stories with a major focus on leadership.¹¹³ Moreover, a segment based on at least one of the leaders was the top story on the broadcast 50 per cent of the time.¹¹⁴

The non-leader-based coverage was usually complimentary and tended not to veer too far off the three narratives each of the major parties was attempting to project. For example, if a party talked about housing, as the Liberals did on October 4, the CBC might run an in-depth companion piece the same night.¹¹⁵ If a party talked about the impact of free trade on regional development programs, the CBC could nicely fit it into a story about one such program, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.¹¹⁶ Even on a slow news day, such as Thanksgiving Monday, *The National* could find room for a feature on each party's electoral prospects in Ontario and the issues each campaign intended to highlight to voters.¹¹⁷ Although these types of stories were reporter-driven and may not have struck the same notes as a party would have if they were to write the script, the simple fact that the media were giving airtime to an issue that one of the parties had planned to stress in their overall theme was likely helpful to their prospects.¹¹⁸ Only when one of these stories appeared diametrically opposed to a party's preferred message or

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Calculation based on Appendix I (48.37 per cent).

¹¹⁴ Calculation based on Appendix II (50 per cent).

¹¹⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 4 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹¹⁶ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹¹⁷ *The National*, (Toronto: 10 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

theme did they pose a problem; and the bigger the story, the bigger the problem. One of these stories would have a profound impact on the fortunes of the Liberal campaign in particular, and it dashed any hope in all of the parties that the television media would remain merely a conduit for disseminating their planned messages.

There was little doubt amongst seasoned political observers that Turner was in a rather precarious position within his party. After all, the crushing defeat of 1984 was placed squarely on his shoulders; the caucus was in a state of near-mutiny during the Progressive Conservatives' first mandate and especially during the lead-up to a scheduled 1986 leadership review. The first few weeks of the campaign had not inspired much confidence in Turner's ability to pull out a victory. As Fraser observes in his chapter entitled "A Very Canadian Coup," despite a marked improvement in his campaign style, "Turner's strong performances were undermined by the devastating television clips that showed him to be either too emotional, too extreme, or limping and in pain [from a back injury]. There was despair in the party, and among the senior campaign strategists. Turner's unpopularity was being reinforced, and all the accumulated negative feelings about his leadership began to coalesce."¹¹⁹ Still, few could reasonably predict just how desperate some senior members of the party were to jettison their leader.

Shortly after the disastrous childcare announcement, the polls were showing the Liberals in third place nationally¹²⁰ and Turner, being the least popular choice for Prime Minister,¹²¹ polling lower than the "hypothetical choices of [Pierre] Trudeau and [Jean]

¹¹⁸ Mendelsohn, (1996), pp. 112-125.

¹¹⁹ Fraser, p. 227.

¹²⁰ Please refer to Appendix IV.

¹²¹ Fraser, p. 228.

Chrétien.”¹²² Against this backdrop, some senior Liberals considered whether it would be feasible to replace their leader in the midst of an election in order to salvage whatever they could from the campaign. Exactly what transpired in a series of secret meetings and discussions between the likes of campaign co-chairs Senator Al Graham and Andre Ouellet, Peter Connolly, chair of the party’s strategy committee Michael Kirby, Martin Goldfarb, campaign director John Webster, and Tom Axworthy, among others, is still not entirely clear; however, the situation was grave enough to be considered at an insider lunch meeting in Ottawa, resulting in a memo to be sent to the leader to show how brutal the situation was.

The memo was intended to stress that Turner was performing very well, but that he needed to more strictly adhere to the demands of the dominant medium, television. Once again, the leader was out-of-touch with the new electronic ethos of campaigning – old style politics were being trumped by new style, agenda-setting politics. However, it was also designed to impress upon him that some of the problems with the media were not of his own making. In the memo sent to Turner, Michael Kirby wrote: “Media coverage appears to be less generous, or less tolerant, towards Liberal mistakes than it is to the mistakes of other parties. The TV clips being used of Turner are generally unfavourable, even at events which have gone well.”¹²³ It was a critique Liberals would make again and again during the first few weeks of the campaign. The Tories under Mulroney and the NDP under Broadbent seemed to be more attuned to the imperatives of fighting a “boob-tube” election campaign. For example, Fraser notes that one night “*The National* ran a clip of Turner stumbling over the phrase ‘birthright’ and saying ‘birth

¹²² Ibid., p. 230.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 237.

rate,' [during an otherwise well-received speech]."¹²⁴ Keith Boag's report, while mentioning Turner's strong performance, devoted substantial time to speculation about whether a wealthy Liberal candidate bought blocks of tickets for the dinner reception to ensure a strong turn-out and noted that at times the leader "sounded as though he was pleading with his own party not to desert him."¹²⁵ Peter Connolly later contended that "for two weeks, Turner performed very well – and got awful, awful, awful, awful coverage."¹²⁶ In his memo, Kirby advised the Liberal leader that the TV images made him look "like he was yelling at Canadians rather than talking to them; [that he looked] far too emotional, too passionate, rather than calm, rational and low-key like Mulroney and Broadbent.... This television image is made worse by Turner's limp which... is helping destroy the image of Turner as a strong leader."¹²⁷ Connolly recalls overhearing television people crying out "He's limping! He's limping! Shoot that!" He defined the TV coverage Turner received in the first few weeks as "just brutal.... He did things and you'd look at the television that night and say, 'Jesus Christ, was I there?'"¹²⁸ A leader's legitimacy within his own party was now being questioned because of his effectiveness on television.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 232. In an interview (2006), Boag noted that sometimes, due to deadlines, a reporter must decide what will be in his or her story before an event is finished. He says the 'birthright – birth rate' mix-up was unfortunate, but he had seen an advance copy of the speech and highlighted that segment as the clip he wanted to use. Unlike print reporters who could clean up the text, on television a reporter is forced to use what he or she has.

¹²⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 12 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹²⁶ Fraser, p. 232.

¹²⁷ Ibid. It is important to take into account the visual elements when analyzing news reports for evidence of agenda-setting. This is one area of observation Matthew Mendelsohn's otherwise excellent work tends to ignore. For example, although he writes that television, unlike print, has a visual component that leads to a "melodramatic imperative.... The effect of television's melodramatic imperative may be that viewers evaluate political candidates not based on what they say, but on how they act, move, behave and whether they are exciting," he provides few examples. Mendelsohn, (March 1994), pp. 85-86. Turner's limp was one of the most noticeable examples of this in the 1988 campaign, but as detailed in subsequent chapters on this thesis, the Liberal leader's movement in the debates greatly aided his delivery and proved effective in

Despite some preliminary discussions about whether Turner would be asked to step down, or tell Canadians his health was too poor to go on, by the time the meeting was over and the memo was drafted, it had been decided that changing horses in mid-stream was a very bad idea. Instead of any further instability, the senior advisors resolved to concentrate on ensuring Turner had a good performance in the leadership debates.¹²⁹ The matter, believed to be settled, would rear its ugly head days later, however, and this time there would be a very public display.

CBC senior parliamentary editor Don Newman received a call from the network's parliamentary bureau chief, Elly Alboim, who was running the election desk about two weeks into the campaign, asking him to drop everything and move from Ottawa to Toronto to work on an astonishing tip they had received.¹³⁰ A well-informed source, whom Alboim will still not reveal, told the newsroom that some senior Liberals running for re-election and some party advisors had held talks about the tragic state of their campaign and the possibility of replacing an increasingly unpopular leader. When follow-up phone calls seemed to confirm the major details of the story, Newman left the capital for Toronto, and moved into the Sutton Place Hotel to assist in getting the story ready for an upcoming broadcast.¹³¹

Newman, along with *The National's* anchor, Peter Mansbridge, Alboim, and a few other senior producers carefully guarded their secret and quietly attempted to corroborate all the important details of the story with at least two reliable sources, the

telling the audience who "won" the debate and the media in framing it.

¹²⁸ Fraser, p. 232.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

¹³⁰ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹³¹ Ibid.

usual journalistic failsafe.¹³² The pressure was intense. Not only was this potentially the biggest story to come out of the election, but it soon became evident the CBC was not the only media organization chasing it. Newman today says he remembers being put on hold one night for Bob Kaplan, the Member of Parliament for York Centre and a frontbencher in Turner's caucus who was among the men to secretly discuss the Liberal leader's future. After half an hour of waiting, Kaplan came on the line and told his stunned interviewer that he had just been talking about the same story with the *Globe and Mail's* Graham Fraser.¹³³

Every night, the group working on the story would meet in Alboim's Toronto office to update one another on what they had discovered. "We worked on it, and after about four or five days it seemed pretty clear, but we hadn't got it nailed yet where we were comfortable going with it," Newman remembers.¹³⁴ Finally, one night they learned that one elusive source with whom they needed to speak was coming to Toronto. Newman made some calls to learn what flight he would be on and rushed out to the airport to intercept him. Once he found the source, Newman brokered his way into sharing a limo ride downtown with him where he could press for answers. "There was nowhere for him to go, and he couldn't hang up," Newman laughs. "This was during rush hour, so it took about an hour to get downtown. By then we had the confirmation we needed. So I thanked him, let him out, took the limo to the CBC just in time for our meeting and I said 'I think we're okay.'"¹³⁵

With the story confirmed by enough sources to conform to the CBC's standards

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid. After they broke the story, the *Globe* redid their front page to cover it. Newman says they basically had it, but needed more sources to confirm it.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

for fact-checking, it would soon be ready for air. Now the question became a matter of when *The National* should schedule it. Alboim describes the debate between members of the team as being very intense. “There was no question of not reporting it at all,” he explains. “It was going to be reported. The question was do we hold it and wait to air it until after the election was over. We felt more comfortable airing it once it had resolved itself.”¹³⁶ The degree to which the reporters, editors and producers agonized over the timing of the revelation to their audience was indicative of the seismic political reverberations that would surely follow. Their discomfort was also reflective of the debate over whether it was appropriate to publicize information that could change the course of the election. “It was a classic dilemma,” says Alboim. “It was clearly of news value; it had happened; it was over – versus the impact that it would have on an election campaign and whether we needed or felt it ethically appropriate to intrude on the campaign. But it was a story that would suggest a number of highly placed people in the party had lost confidence in their leader.”¹³⁷ In short, to what degree did the media want to set the election’s agenda?

This dilemma was amplified by the medium’s agenda-setting, priming and framing powers. In a time when most people agreed there should be a national debate over issues and ideas, it seemed perverse to focus so much attention on the inner working of a campaign. Some members of the CBC’s news bureau, like Mansbridge and Alboim, were already concerned about the extent to which leadership-based coverage from the planes was driving out issues-based coverage. Reporting this story could influence the ballot’s ultimate criterion: would the electorate be voting on the type of country it wanted

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Alboim interview.

or would voters be influenced by the competence of leaders and the support leaders enjoyed from their own parties? Yet if the news bureau chose to wait until the campaign had concluded, would the electorate cast a truly informed vote?

“I think we erred on the side of disclosure, but clearly chose not to report it in mid-course,” Alboim explains in retrospect. “So while we were so close to it that we actually saw it happening over 48 hours and we probably could have reported it before the people involved made any final decisions, we chose to let the thing play out, partly because we didn’t think it appropriate to report a dynamic of that sort, not knowing where it would end up and knowing it might have incalculable consequences. Ultimately, we decided that it had been so seriously discussed and was so indicative of the way senior members, including Members of Parliament, regarded the leader, that the decision to withhold information from the electorate was morally equivalent to the decision to share it. And in that case we erred on the side of disclosure.”¹³⁷ As Fraser notes in Playing For Keeps: The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, “... they concluded that if they didn’t tell the story, they would be participating in a fraud by carrying on the TV coverage of the Turner campaign.”¹³⁹

Having discussed the ethical aspects of merely reporting what they knew, the time now came to decide how to present the story to their audience. When critics later attacked the CBC over the report, they took special aim at its construction and delivery. Fraser notes that “for some years, Mansbridge had worked on what he called ‘re-creation pieces: fairly lengthy pieces of television reporting in which he reconstructed complex events.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Fraser, p. 251. Fraser later notes that, in retrospect, Mansbridge and Alboim “wonder about the capacity of television as a medium to convey a story as complicated and as full of nuance as the story reported on

He had done it to tell the story of how Canadians had helped American hostages in Iran escape, how Joe Clark had agreed to adopt the policy of moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and, in his longest TV news item, a twelve-minute piece, how the deal had been struck on the patriation of the Constitution in 1981. In each case, he had used unnamed sources, and various graphic visual techniques to illustrate things which, by their nature, had not taken place in front of TV cameras.”¹⁴⁰ The technique would not be out of place in a television newsmagazine like *The Journal* or *60 Minutes*, with their mandates to explore and elaborate the news, but such lengthy pieces without event-based camera footage or on-screen interviews were exceptionally rare on newscasts. Alboim suggests the unusual length of the piece – clocking in at more than four minutes – was appropriate for an “unusual story.”¹⁴¹

There were other rather unusual elements that made the story’s presentation more eye-catching. Mansbridge, normally in the anchor’s chair, was replaced on the evening the report aired and assumed the role of a field reporter. Newman recalls that the decision to have Mansbridge present the story was made for a number of reasons. First, since the story was so carefully guarded, only two on-air personalities were involved in putting it together and there was little sense in bringing in someone new at the last minute. Newman was dispatched to speak about the story on *The Journal* and Mansbridge set about writing and re-writing the script for *The National*. Alboim offers a slightly different perspective. “The decision of Mansbridge to host it was more of a default position than a considered one,” he suggests. “He had been one of the front-line reporters on the story, he was privy to more first-hand information, and I think there was a desire, because the story

Oct. 19.” P. 263.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 249.

would be so controversial, to give it the credibility that an anchor could give, which we did.”¹⁴² According to Mansbridge, the real reason was his own intense desire to do it. He had originally started gathering information about the rumours with Alboim and by the time it was ready for air it was obvious the person who had been working on it should report it. Mansbridge today says he considers anchor duties as essentially another form of reporting.¹⁴³

Critics also charged that the placement of the piece in the newscast’s lineup on October 19 further underscored its exceptional nature.¹⁴⁴ Although the story was a scoop for the CBC, it ran fourth in the broadcast, following a story of divisions among Liberals over the party’s position on the abortion question. Both Mansbridge and Alboim contend that the reason for the story’s relative burying was to implicitly inform viewers that it wasn’t an issue of burning importance anymore. Mansbridge, who as anchor is involved in line-up decisions every day, says he can’t recall the exact discussions that took place on the day the story aired, but the fact was that Turner had resisted calls to step down and the report was after-the-fact. “It’s easy to look back now and say it’s the most important item. Perhaps it was. Hindsight makes you wonder about a lot of decisions.”¹⁴⁵ Alboim is more definitive in his reasoning. “Despite understanding it was the dominant news story of the day, we wanted to signal to the audience that ultimately it was not as significant as the daily discussion of issues,” he stresses. Reflecting on the placement of the piece later, reporter Keith Boag concedes “whether that mitigated anything or just in our imagination

¹⁴¹ Alboim interview.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Mansbridge interview.

¹⁴⁴ John Duffy, interview by author, March 17, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹⁴⁵ Mansbridge interview.

I guess is for other people to decide.”¹⁴⁶

A final bone of contention with critics was the misleading nature of some parts of the report. In addition to making minor errors in the script, including the day of the meeting in which senior Liberals contemplated dumping their leader, the number of people present and the author of the memo to Turner, a graphic representation of the memo in question flashed on the screen during the story. “The picture insinuated that they had a copy of the memo, and they did not,” Fraser writes.¹⁴⁷ Mansbridge agrees that the memo should have been clearly labeled as an illustration to remove any doubt, but he argues that these types of criticisms shouldn’t detract from the thrust of what was reported. “When you’re trying to knock down a story in the campaign, you don’t knock the thesis if it’s true; you chip away at the manner in which it was presented. Should they have mentioned the memo was a graphic representation? Yes, but it’s hardly a reason to knock the story. Of course, they looked pretty stupid six months later when it was confirmed by the party itself.”¹⁴⁸

Shortly before the story aired, Alboim contacted Keith Boag on the Liberal plane to give him a run-down and prepare him to get reaction from the campaign team. Boag wasn’t privy to the conversations on the ground during the preparations for the piece, but he did know that something was going on, that Turner was having problems with his party and that he should look for signs.¹⁴⁹ When he finally did hear the full details, Boag says he “felt sick about it because it had a kind of creepiness to it.”¹⁵⁰ The picture Alboim painted was of Turner and the people with him on the plane being completely detached

¹⁴⁶ Boag interview.

¹⁴⁷ Fraser, p. 253.

¹⁴⁸ Mansbridge interview.

¹⁴⁹ Boag interview. This perhaps explains Boag’s early reporting and the focus he put on Liberal divisions.

from what was happening on the ground and flying around from place to place utterly alone. Boag says that characterization may be an over-dramatization, but he suggests it appeared to be like Plato's allegory of the Cave. Boag had been staring at the shadows whereas everything was happening somewhere else. "It's a pretty ugly reality," he concludes.¹⁵¹

Ultimately, it is very clear the leadership coup attempt had to be reported. Although the CBC news team firmly moved away from any notion of the media-as-a-mirror of public political events in this case, investigative journalists had uncovered and fully corroborated a situation which could have far reaching ramifications for the public. If senior Liberals were seriously considering removing their leader John Turner in mid-campaign, how could producers continue to keep the public in the dark? However much the Liberals tried to downplay Turner in their campaign, the fact that he would become prime minister if they formed a government made him an integral part of the voting equation.

The story created a perfect storm which forced the Liberal ship far off its mapped course and scuppered its attempt to set a positive and desirable agenda. With leadership being a primary focus of modern televised campaigns and Turner already suffering from low scores, the explosive report emphasized and reinforced the negative impressions of the Liberal leader that were spelled out in the party memo. Moreover, with the Tories' stressing their "team" and the NDP name-checking their own popular leader as much as they could, the Liberals appeared to be failing on both counts. Even more distressing for Turner and his crew, the same journalistic pack that pounced on the fiasco of his poorly-

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

executed childcare policy launch now ravenously sought to uncover more details about the coup attempt. Both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* published their own versions of the story on October 20, although the *Star*'s story strangely disappeared in later editions.¹⁵²

Other news outlets also desired to spill ink on the topic, but they took aim at the CBC. Boag recalls several really uncomfortable days followed for him on the plane. His colleagues decided to attack the story and argue that it was not true. "Clearly, when every reporter on the plane is getting a call from their desk [saying] 'what the hell is going on the plane, you're right there, how come we don't have the story,' – that puts them in a defensive mood, and the best defense is a good offense," Boag explains.¹⁵³ Don Newman contends the print reporters were especially vitriolic in their attacks because they had been beaten to it. "And they attacked it for not having named sources," he offers, "but of course, newspapers are full of unnamed sources."¹⁵⁴ The *Ottawa Citizen* was so furious that it wrote an editorial criticizing the CBC for using unnamed sources shortly before running its own front page story that used unnamed sources, Newman would later point out.

Immediately following the newscast, the people aboard the Liberal plane tried to do some damage control.¹⁵⁵ "To his credit, neither Turner nor his staff directly denied the

¹⁵² Mansbridge interview.

¹⁵³ Boag interview. Graham Fraser notes, that at the time of publication of his book in 1989, journalists were still arguing about the story. Journalist William Johnson, who "dissected the CBC report phrase by phrase," called it "television at its most allusive, most impressionistic, least precise, and most irresponsible," Fraser, p. 262.

¹⁵⁴ Newman interview.

¹⁵⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 20 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The. In the broadcast, Newman calls the Liberal performance "a classic example of a political damage control operation."

story,” says Alboim. “They found ways to appear to deny it.”¹⁵⁶ Peter Connolly said the story was “preposterous,”¹⁵⁷ and Turner called the idea of the story “nonsense,” and “the craziest thing he had heard in the last four years,”¹⁵⁸ both carefully chosen words according to Boag. “They were able to create the impression there was untruth to it, but that’s not what preposterous means,” he notes.¹⁵⁹ The next day, on the campaign trail, Turner resumed his visits to businesses that could be hurt by free trade and tried to act as calmly and normally as he could. As Boag told viewers, “if there was concern about last night’s report on *The National*, it didn’t show.”¹⁶⁰ Putting stock into his advisors’ idea that a strong debate performance, scheduled for October 24 and 25 could turn the campaign around, he set his sights squarely at his big hope and aimed to build anticipation for the meeting. “I’ll tell you, the other fellow has been locked up in his cage, but on Monday and Tuesday they got to pull him out and we’re going to make him sing,” he said resolutely to the cameras.¹⁶¹

Turner’s belligerent pitch belied the intense concern in the Liberal camp. As Fraser noted in the conclusion to “A Very Canadian Coup,” “as the debates drew near, the stakes were extremely high for John Turner.”¹⁶² The party’s attempt to set the agenda for the campaign and write a desired narrative was a dismal failure. The forty-point policy platform, on which the Liberals had spent months of preparation time, was too dense to be navigated within the constraints of television news reports. Worse, when the

¹⁵⁶ Alboim interview.

¹⁵⁷ Boag interview.

¹⁵⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 20 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹⁵⁹ Boag interview.

¹⁶⁰ *The National*, (Toronto: 20 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* For his part, Mulroney tried to underline the importance of “leadership and competence” in the race.

party did manage some success in illuminating a policy each day, a small misstep, such as the mismanaged childcare announcement, threw the campaign off kilter and prompted journalists to question whether the leader and his candidates actually knew what was in their thick policy briefing binders. Extraneous irritants, such as a book written by one of Turner's current advisors which seemingly criticized the leader, drew attention away from the tour and the leader's message. And perhaps most frustrating, television coverage of well-run events did not reflect those successes and stories such as the CBC's take on the coup attempt completely detracted from the planned campaign. The attention-grabbing coup story seemed to replace the party's own agenda with one of the media's own making.

In contrast, although both Mulroney and Broadbent suffered some minor setbacks during the first few weeks of the campaign, both leaders were able to stay on message and control the tenor and pace of their campaigns. The polls seemed to reflect their momentum, to the detriment of the Liberals.¹⁶³ On the eve of the leadership debates, the Liberal Party of Canada, and its leader, John Turner, had their backs against the wall. In order to stave off likely defeat, they would have to embrace the medium that caused so much damage to them just days before. In fact, the advice in the memo to Turner that had resulted in the most recent body blow to the campaign would prove to be its salvation.

Upon reflection, it is clear that television news had replaced print as the most important mass medium in reaching voters during an election. The Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party each predominantly and successfully used this mode of message transmission to reach a vast electorate and suggest which themes

¹⁶² Fraser, p. 263.

¹⁶³ Please refer to Appendix IV.

and issues voters should keep in mind when casting a ballot. Conversely, the Liberals, led by a man who had still not fully escaped the old-style political campaigning and media relations he favoured, stumbled awkwardly. Although this party also managed to construct several successful television media-oriented events which flattered and promoted its agenda and garnered some positive news coverage, all too often the party found itself on the defensive and at the mercy of the television media instead of its master. Polling numbers indicated that parties who were not able to conduct a strong televised campaign would proceed at their own peril.

Moreover, the 1988 campaign produced many instances where the media began to challenge the pre-planned narratives their subjects were presenting or the methods they employed to ensure that they essentially wrote the script. Whether commenting on obstacles that prevented reporters from getting close to the leaders they were following, seizing upon mistakes or visible weakness at party events, or uncovering damaging internal dissension, the television news media had become progressively activist in its coverage. Although they remained wedded to certain pictures the parties created for their consumption, and financial considerations dictated some of the attention they lavished on the leaders' plane tours, television journalism was certainly an intimate and decisive influence on the tide of the election campaign. The first few weeks of Campaign '88 confirmed this was a "boob-tube election."

Chapter Six: The Miracle Down The Backstretch

The Liberals could take very little comfort in the state of their campaign as October dragged on. The one issue where they were the most vulnerable – leadership – seemed to be dominating the public debate. This was due in part to television’s agenda-setting abilities and in part to the defined focus of the other campaigns. With the Conservatives touting their ability to manage change and the NDP asking people to give their popular leader “a chance,” the media perpetuated an uninspiring image of the Liberal leader and revealed that the party did not have full confidence in him – the very same leader to whom they were asking Canadians to give a mandate. The party’s best hope lay in wrestling the election agenda away from the other parties and steering the media on a new course. Having failed to promote their message through the filters of the nightly television newscasts, the Liberals opted to launch their second offensive through alternative methods. Although television was still their preferred medium for connecting with the public, the party intended to bypass the media gatekeepers as much as they possibly could through more direct messaging, political advertising and the opportunity of the leaders’ debates.

Thirty-Second Vignettes: The Initial Political Ads

In an attempt to level the playing field, the *Canada Election Act* included stipulations which precluded parties from buying advertising on the country’s airwaves during a campaign’s formative first few weeks.¹ As a result, “earned media coverage,” or the coverage the news media sees fit to give a party, was the primary focus of campaign

¹ Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa : Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 22.

teams in this period.² The delicate dance between strategists and reporters for control over what is aired continued unabated until the start of the paid advertising period. At this point the parties can buy a direct line to voters over the television airwaves and reduce the gate-keeping of the news media middlemen. As Walter Soderlund, a professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor, noted in an essay on political advertising in the 1993 Canadian federal election, “Paid political advertising is advantageous precisely because it gives campaign professionals seemingly complete control over the message that is transmitted: the content of the message, how many times a particular message will be transmitted, to what types of audiences and at what times of the day or night. Paid political advertising uses mass media as a direct transmission channel from the party to the voter, in that journalists do not have the opportunity to filter, frame or interpret the message.”³ In a sense, this could be described as a second phase of election agenda-setting – a more overt game of direct messaging.

The end of the earned-only media period coincided with the timing of the two leaders’ debates on October 24 and 25. During this transition period, an onslaught of advertising – or “party propaganda” as Duffy calls it⁴ – and direct appeals from Mulroney, Turner and Broadbent to the home viewing audience would be a potent combination if staged effectively. Many televised election ads were prepared weeks in

² In an article for the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Walter Soderlund, a professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor, notes that “For parties without large campaign budgets, this ‘free’ media coverage is vital to getting their message to voters, and even the most well financed party cannot afford to overlook the advantages of positive news coverage and the obvious perils of its opposite.” Walter Soderlund, “Advertising in the 1993 Federal Election,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review [Online]*, 18, no. 1, (1995), available from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Infoparl/english/issue.htm?param=152&art=1031>, Internet.

³ Ibid. He also argued that by 1993 “the seeming advantage of paid political advertising [had] been to some degree diminished. In recent elections, political ads themselves have become a topic of media scrutiny and thus commentary on their honesty, taste, and effectiveness, inevitably intrude on how they will be evaluated by viewers.”

⁴ John Duffy, *Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership and the Making of Canada*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 336.

advance of the lifting of the embargo creating a wide variety of products from which strategists could select a message that was tailored to circumstances of each political day. Each major party highlighted spots that were aired to not only play to their advantage, but also reinforce their agenda and desired narrative.

With the biggest war chest, the Conservatives could easily afford the most lavish production; however, the Tories' early spots were fairly simple, restrained affairs. "The initial strategy was to rely primarily on endorsements," explains Robert Krause. "By utilizing non-party spokespersons, it was hoped to show that the party had an agenda, good leadership and broad-based support."⁵ John Duffy notes that the spot with the heaviest rotation in the first few days of the paid-period "threw a bunch of newspaper quotes over stills of Mulroney doing prime ministerish things: sitting at his desk, chatting with the chancellor of West Germany, giving a speech. The voice-over concluded the laundry list of kudos with: 'Prime Minister Mulroney – The initiator of [Canada's] great new era.'"⁶ Although Duffy depreciatingly calls the advertisement "as exciting and grabby as the rest of their campaign,"⁷ its format accomplished the party's objective of showing Canadians that the Progressive Conservatives were hard at work and their leader was competent and, as always, managing change. The spot also implicitly asked viewers to consider the alternative – a Liberal leader so ineffectual, mistrusted, and uninspiring that his own party wanted to remove him.

The NDP's opening salvo in the advertising wars was a series of 30-second spots designed to highlight their popular leader. Robin Sears calls the party's initial advertising

⁵ Frizzell and others, p. 22.

⁶ Duffy, p. 339.

⁷ Ibid.

“feel good, leadership-issue focused messages.”⁸ Jokingly referred to as the “on Golden Pond” phase of the campaign, due to the very rich colour balance and “cheerful outdoorsy settings,” of the ads, the most memorable spot featured a grandfather and grandson walking together by a body of water. Unfortunately, this “golden pond,” was a lake “ruined by pollution.”⁹ When the little boy asks if it can be fixed, the grandfather, who swam in the lake with the boy’s father years ago, tells his grandchild, “First, we need a leader who isn’t afraid to stand up to the big corporate polluters.” The old man informs the youngster that “Brian Mulroney promised that, but he let us down, just like the Liberals. This time, I’m voting for Ed Broadbent.” In a final tug on the viewer’s heartstrings, the boy asks “Can I vote for Ed Broadbent too, grandpa?”¹⁰

Duffy concedes that “it was impossible not to smile at the artistry....”¹¹ As if the words weren’t powerful enough, the carefully chosen sounds and professionally filmed shots immediately caught the ear and captured the eye. From the opening shot of grandfather and grandson shown in the lake’s reflection looking down from a dock, to the melancholy piano music playing softly in the background, to the close-up shot of the man reaching to hold his grandson’s hand, the *mise-en-scène* masterfully bolstered the message and provided clever visual metaphors. For example, a shot where the boy balances himself while walking on a log, holding his grandfather’s hand, symbolically emphasizes for the audience of the ecological balancing act the country is facing. Voters, now thinking of the world they would leave for their descendents, saw an aged hand

⁸ Robin Sears, interview by author, March 24, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁹ “Grandfather and Child: the Environment,” New Democratic Party Advertisement. Found at the end of the broadcast, *The Journal*, (Toronto: 26 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The. Journal broadcast on Oct. 26.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Duffy, p. 339.

guiding a fragile and young one through a troubling reality.¹²

Most important, however, the advertisement as a whole was the embodiment of everything the NDP strategists had envisioned at the outset of the campaign. The advertisement was designed “to touch the chord in people that says ‘I’ve had it with those other two guys, Ed Broadbent is for ordinary folks like me, so this time I’m giving Ed a chance,’” as the NDP’s director of communications Julie Mason had urged. It took an issue, namely the environment, that was important to the electorate and one with which the NDP was trusted, and masterfully matched it with the over-arching strength of their popular leader. The ad in and of itself was a most successful framing initiative. The only problem, as Duffy contends, was that it was “difficult to keep the spot in mind while the shoot-out between Turner and Mulroney was brewing.”¹³ The NDP’s self-image advertising and the Tories’ appeal to the dignified leadership of their “old man” would, however, soon be trumped by the hard-image offerings of the Liberals. Without the filter of media interpretation, the Liberals decided to maximize the direct, agenda-setting power of paid advertising.

The first shot fired was in the form of a devastating Liberal advertisement called “Border.” Unlike the less-aggressive messages coming from the Tory or NDP camps, the “Border Ad” had sinister overtones.¹⁴ The 30-second spot, unleashed at the beginning of the paid advertising period on October 23, opened with a shot of large, presidential looking room¹⁵ with two men sitting at a table. As a pan through a doorway revealed

¹² “Grandfather and Child: the Environment,” New Democratic Party Advertisement.

¹³ Duffy, p. 339.

¹⁴ Graham Fraser cites Martin Goldfarb’s claim that “all campaigns were run on either love or fear. With a great leader, a party could run on what he called ‘love issues’; without one, they couldn’t. ‘In this case, we ain’t got a leader who is loved, so we have to play fear,’ Goldfarb said,” Fraser, p. 312.

¹⁵ Fraser suggests “the natural lighting in the shot made the room look as if it might be the White House, or Camp David: some gracious environment for negotiations,” Ibid.

Canadian and American flags in the background, one of the men, a young executive-type, says “since we’re talking about this free trade agreement, there’s one line I’d like to change.” The other man, appearing to be older and less sure of himself, asks “which line is that?” The younger man, now revealed to be a U.S. negotiator takes out a pencil and points to a piece of paper on the table. “Well, this one here,” he exclaims, in a voice somewhat similar to U.S. President Ronald Reagan. “It’s just getting in the way.” A new shot reveals that the line in question is the red border between Canada and United States on a map. As the U.S. negotiator uses his pencil’s eraser to remove the line, the Canadian’s foot is seen nervously shaking underneath the table. A stern voice-over then asks: “Just how much are we giving away in the Mulroney free trade deal? Our water? Our healthcare? Our culture? The line has been drawn. Which side do you stand on?” As viewers witness a final shot of the North American continent without the 49th parallel border line, the announcer stresses, “Don’t let Mulroney deceive you again. This is more than an election. It’s your future.”¹⁶ The ad created a dramatic visual and emotional impact with regard to the free trade issue.

Unlike other Liberal ads produced at the time which tended to “look” like political ads, this production had the same sort of theatrical gloss as the NDP’s environment spot. Yet the Grit ad managed to appeal to viewers emotionally and play on their worst fears. The decline in the health of the environment was one thing, but this advertisement told the audience that if the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was ratified, they would lose their very country. Worse still for the Progressive Conservatives, repeated showing of the spot only further accentuated this fear. Tory pollster Allan Gregg

¹⁶ “Draw the Line: Canadian Sovereignty,” Liberal Party Advertisement. Found at the end of *The Journal*, (Toronto: 25 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National.

told Graham Fraser in The Making of the Prime Minister, 1988, that the first time he previewed the ad for a focus group they laughed. The second time, the silence was deafening. “They said ‘You know, it’s obvious that they’re exaggerating; the border’s not going to go away, and we’re not going to become Americans,’” Gregg recalled. “But it tells us that we’re going to lose something in free trade, and that really worries me; I wonder if the risk is worth it.”¹⁷ Suddenly, the Liberals had found a way to wrestle the election’s agenda away from the other parties. The ad shifted the public’s response from the reading of the practical – economics and leadership – and placed it in the realm of the emotional and primal.

The Liberal advertisement perfected the symbolic attack. The vanishing border,¹⁸ the earnest but nervous Canadian versus the confident American,¹⁹ the distance from any open debate – these aspects combined to create an extremely powerful piece of television. In fact, when the CBC’s *Sunday Report* conducted its own focus group assessment of the advertisements on the day they were launched, one participant exclaimed, “In terms of impact, I have one word: Pow! It hits you right in the eye.”²⁰ One other important facet of the advertisement, which may not have been as apparent to viewers, was the absence of John Turner. Although the CBC coup story had exacerbated the Liberal leader’s popularity problems, these most recent internal squabbles were not the reason for his

¹⁷ Fraser, p. 315.

¹⁸ “[It] visually just captured it in a very concise way – it really got people thinking about it,” Fraser quotes David Morton as saying, *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “When we saw the casting, we were ecstatic,” Morton says. “Because the Canadian guy looked very serious, very good, but a little bit ‘Oh, geez, am I getting taken to the cleaners here?’ Whereas the American looks much more sure of himself, and we did this with no voice things, they were both decent people, and we didn’t make one seem like the ugly American,” *Ibid.*, p. 314.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 312. Robert Mason Lee also notes, “According to market research and tracking data compiled by Martin Goldfarb, ‘Map’ was the most successful advertisement produced by the Liberal Party in twenty years,” Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*, (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 226.

omission. The “Border” ad had its genesis more than a month earlier and, once again, was based on focus group testing.²¹ The Liberal strategy of downplaying an unpopular leader and trumpeting the fear factor had revealed itself once more.

All three advertising campaigns, some more successfully than others, had offered the electorate direct, unmediated pitches which flattered their campaign themes and agendas. The Conservatives reinforced the image of their party and leader as comfortably managing whatever was asked of them in office, the New Democrats’ drum beat to the rhythm of ‘give Ed a chance,’ and the Liberals tried to rekindle the ill-feelings the populace harboured towards the government and exploit its unease about the free trade agreement. Ultimately, the Liberals’ “Border” spot, which was arguably the most memorable and effective, utilized the full power of the televised medium to convey its desired message. As Fraser writes, it conformed to the most important principle of the profession. Quoting advertising guru David Ogilvy in Confessions of an Advertising Man, he notes that “in television you must make your pictures tell the story; what you show is more important than what you say. Words and pictures must march together, reinforcing each other. The only function of the words is to explain what the pictures are showing... If you say something which you don’t also illustrate, the viewer immediately forgets it. I conclude that if you don’t show it, there’s no point in saying it. Try running your commercial with the sound off; if it doesn’t sell without sound, it’s useless.”²² For all the prime ministerial responsibilities Mulroney was shown to be fulfilling and for all the touchy-feely symbolism in the NDP’s environmental ad, nothing could compare to a man erasing the border between Canada and her powerful neighbour to the south. More

²¹ Focus groups revealed audiences didn’t want to see the Liberal leader, although they did want to see Mulroney. Fraser, p. 313.

²² Ibid., p. 310.

than any other initial ad offering, the Liberals' ad could cut through distractions, clutch a viewer and excite some underlying nagging fears. With lightning quickness, it had redefined the public's mood.²³ The same shift had happened in 1891 and 1911,²⁴ but here the speed of transition was dramatic, courtesy of the electronic media, and particularly television. The party had recovered control of its message. Now it needed its champion to deliver it when all eyes were on him.

The Debates: It's Easy To Exceed Low Expectations

As effective as television advertisements were in bypassing the news media filter,²⁵ they were also very brief and scattered throughout the television schedule.²⁶ A viewer might catch one or two of these commercials if they weren't taking a bathroom break, but the very nature of their placement ensured it was not appointment television – programming a viewer actively wanted to see.²⁷ Instead, like a few grenades lobbed into enemy territory, these initial television spots were designed to loosen up the ground

²³ Liberal strategist John Webster notes the initial Progressive Conservative advertising was rated a distant third by internal tracking polls. Journalist Hugh Winsor suggests that "if there is one 'magic moment' in the advertising campaign so far, a consensus of partisans, opponents and pollsters would nominate the Liberal ad purporting to show the Canadian and U.S. free trade negotiators." Moreover, David Morton, the Liberal advertising director, explains that when the ad was first shown to focus groups before the debates there was a good reaction. But when the same ad was tested after the debates, the response was "incredibly positive." He argues that this illustrates "people's views of Mr. Turner (even though they were watching material taped weeks ago) is much more positive now because of the debates." Hugh Winsor. "The Ad battle escalates." *The Globe and Mail*, 5 November, 1988, p. D2.

²⁴ See relevant chapters in J. Murray Beck's *Pendulum of Power*, for example.

²⁵ In his essay in the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Walter Soderland suggests that this situation was already beginning to change as journalists began to report on the ads themselves. For example, the CBC *Sunday Report* focus group on Oct. 23, and an item on the state of advertising in the campaign on *The National* on Nov. 3 and Nov. 14. Soderland, available from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Infoparl/english/issue.htm?param=152&art=1031>

²⁶ Although bookending news programming like *The National* and *The Journal* was considered prime time.

²⁷ According to Statistics Canada, "Canadians watched an average of 23.5 hours of television per week in the fall of 1988," *Culture Statistics: Television Viewing in Canada 1986-1988*, (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Education, Culture and Tourism Division, 1990,) p. 7. However, some demographic segments watched more hours on average. "Women watched more television than men – over 20 per cent more in some groups," Ibid. Bureau of Broadcast Measurement Reports, including "BBM network audience estimates," and "BBM top rated TV programs among adults 18-49" suggest women who stayed at home during the daytime accounted for much of this difference.

ahead before the heavy artillery moved in, and the biggest weapon at the campaigns' disposal was a strong performance by their candidate in the televised leaders' debates. As Duffy observes in Fights of Our Lives, "The debate production is a high tech marvel, the focal point for the vast array of telecommunications, data analysis, and sophisticated marketing techniques that make up a modern election campaign.... By bringing the leaders before the voters as never before, the whiz-bang new technologies of politics have reduced the vast and intricate machinery of a national election campaign to the most ancient political tradition, the one-to-one handshake. Mano a mano; hand to hand. A compact between citizen and leader? A gladiatorial prize fight? Which ever it is, the encounter is up close and personal, for the combatants on the studio floor and for the crowd watching at home."²⁸

The debate format, thus, shored up the existing leadership-focus of the campaign. For weeks before-hand the news media, and particularly the television news reporters on the planes, emphasized the importance of the party leaders as they followed their carefully-planned tours. In this particular election, the NDP's focus on Ed Broadbent, the Progressive Conservatives' desire to portray Prime Minister Brian Mulroney as a strong leader from afar, and the unplanned storm surrounding John Turner's position as the face of the Liberal Party, only served to firm up and bolster the pre-existing fascination with these partisan figureheads by the media and their receptors. Now, finally, the electorate was about to see these men as they really were – or at least as they presented themselves in a studio environment. The three party leaders would also have an opportunity to face one another with few impediments, and challenge their opponents to a straightforward debate on the issues at stake. More than any single newscast or election advertisement,

²⁸ Duffy, p. 312.

this was an event where all eyes would be especially trained on the TV screen. It was a time that could make or break a campaign.

“[Debates are] very important,” confirms NDP strategist Robin Sears. “There’s just no doubt that a subset of the reality is that ballot choice is personified by leadership. Debates, as a platform for the display of leadership quality, have acquired a higher and higher prominence in the campaign theology. And outsiders, as it were, misunderstand the degree to which they have impact both directly and indirectly and subliminally in ways which are absolutely crucial to momentum. If a leader seems to stumble badly, obviously that is very significant negative, and something that members of the press and the most partisan viewers are looking for. But even though that doesn’t happen that often, perceptions of competence and ability, leadership quality, honesty and integrity about the leaders are conveyed very powerfully in the debate format to a lot of soft voters.”²⁹ The leaders’ debate was a relatively new aspect of Canadian federal elections. The debate emerged in the 1960s as television completed its infiltration of Canadian homes and also just as Canadian federal politics became a multi-party affair. No longer were there just two leaders; now there was a range of leaders from mainstream, regional and protest parties, all vying on screen for votes.

The stumble is what John Turner likely feared the most. In his first confrontation with Mulroney and Broadbent four years earlier, one specific misstep had had an incalculable impact on the rest of his 1984 campaign. Although his general performance was far from smooth,³⁰ it was a brief exchange with Mulroney on the topic of patronage that precipitated his decline. During the English televised leaders’ debate, the then prime

²⁹ Sears interview.

³⁰ Fraser, p. 82.

minister was cornered into defending a rash of patronage appointments he had made at the behest of out-going Liberal leader Pierre Elliot Trudeau. As Duffy recounts in Fights Of Our Lives, “Turner lamely asserted that ‘he had no option’ but to make the appointments. ‘You had an option,’ thundered Mulroney. ‘You are the prime minister of Canada.’ This single exchange shoved the Liberals’ shaky support into freefall as swing voters, along with many who had been loyal to the Liberals for generations, abandoned the party of Trudeau and Pearson overnight. A month later Mulroney was elected by a landslide.”³¹ As if the memory of those fateful few words didn’t hang heavily in his mind, Turner would soon receive a timely reminder a few weeks before the Canadian debates from south of the border.

The U.S. Example: Dan Quayle Is No Jack Kennedy

If a political junkie gets his fix by watching election coverage, the autumn months of 1988 might well have given him an overdose. The extensive reporting on the domestic campaign was supplemented by a heaping helping of news from the American presidential race, which was held concurrently. In that contest, two-term Republican Vice-President George H. W. Bush faced Democratic Governor Michael Dukakis in one of the nastiest battles in recent American political history. Although the Canadian and American systems of government differ to a degree – for example, the “priming” of party leaders in the United States is arguably even greater due to their direct elections – there were some striking similarities in the two campaigns. Mirroring the troubles Turner was having in presenting a strong and commanding image as leader, Dukakis was ruthlessly attacked by opponents and pilloried in the media for lacking charisma and stature. The Democrat vice-presidential running mate, Lloyd Bentsen, would offer the struggling

³¹ Duffy, p. 308.

campaign a ray of hope, however. There is little doubt his performance in a vice-presidential debate was not lost on Turner's advisors, both as an example of what the right clip could achieve and a reminder not to repeat his own mistakes from 1984.

When pressed to defend his ability to step into the president's shoes should circumstances warrant such an action, Republican Vice-Presidential hopeful Dan Quayle responded that he had "far more experience than many others that sought the office of vice president as much experience in the Congress as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency.... [and that he would] be prepared to deal with the people in the Bush administration, if that unfortunate event would ever occur."³² Senator Bentsen looked squarely at his opponent and said "I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy."³³ The exchange was immediately seized upon by the American networks as a moment that would perfectly sum up the response of both men to a subject that had been broached on three separate occasions that evening. Even Canadian newscasts saw fit to play it for their own audiences, knowing a good piece of exciting electoral drama when they saw it.

Canadian Networks Prepare For The Debates

With visions of Bentsen's zinger still dancing about their heads and Turner's 1984 meltdown a not-too-distant memory, the CBC news team instinctively thought to plan for "the big moment of the debate."³⁴ First, though, the networks and parties had to agree to hold such an event at all. Although televised leaders' debates would, in the late 20th century, become the norm during a Canadian election campaign, this was not always the

³² "Debating Our Destiny: Vice-presidential transcripts," (American Public Broadcasting System: MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, 2000), available from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/88debates/vp3.html>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

case. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, the assembled leaders would make statements to the camera, but there would be no interaction between candidates. For all intents and purposes, these appearances were extended advertisements – a time when the party leader could speak directly to an audience without being interrupted or challenged by an opponent or panelist. They allowed little opportunity for the public to witness the leaders engaged with each other in context; they were passive beauty contests, not active debates. Even after the first live debate was organized between candidates in the 1979 campaign, there was no certainty that such an occurrence would become a standard part of a federal general election. So intent were Trudeau’s advisors to keep their man out of sight in 1980 that they stalled and delayed negotiations on the format of the proposed debates until it was too late to mount them. As Fraser explains in Playing For Keeps, “In previous elections, the party leading in the polls – such as the Liberals in 1980 – simply negotiated in such a way that the meeting [to discuss holding debates] could not be held, but the Tories felt that because of the commitment Mulroney had made in the past to a debate, and the criticisms about Mulroney’s inaccessibility, they could not afford not to have a debate, or not to show up.”³⁵

Nonetheless, Mulroney’s ability to negotiate the format on his terms was strengthened by the incumbent advantage and the timing of the general election. “The networks... wanted as few debates as possible,” Fraser explains. “Fall was ratings time, and they were determined to lose as little money as possible. Their firmness in this regard worried the opposition parties, who began to fear that the fix was in between the government and the networks to restrict the debates as much as possible, knowing that, if

³⁵ Fraser, p. 265.

negotiations broke down and there were no debates at all, the government would gain.”³⁶ The Liberals had hoped for six debates in total, half in English and half in French. They proposed one coupling to deal with general issues, a second series to highlight women’s issues, and a third grouping where free trade would be the main topic. The NDP preferred at least four encounters, and even the governing Tories were resigned to four debates. However, the consortium of networks offered two two-hour debates, one in each language. Again, the media were able to assert their gatekeeper’s role – to channel political discourse through the conduits of their choice. Robin Sears was especially livid at the proposal. When he returned for another day of discussions, CBC reporter Bill Casey told *The National*’s viewers that he “was still denouncing the networks.”

When the dust settled, two three-hour debates were set for October 24 and 25 in Ottawa’s CJOH television studio, and all the parties were reasonably satisfied. Conservative negotiators successfully scheduled the debates relatively early in the campaign so as to give their leader time to recover if he fell victim to something similar to Turner’s 1984 stumble.³⁷ The NDP received slightly more time than what was first offered and planned, and the Liberals hoped they had found away to pop the prime minister’s campaign bubble, if only for a short time. As Liberal negotiator Francis Fox told reporters, “We wanted a debate badly. We wanted Mr. Turner to have the opportunity of facing Mr. Mulroney face to face. And we will of course accept that under any condition.”³⁸ The format, which gave each leader an opportunity to make opening and closing statements and provided for three one-on-one match-ups, when the odd man

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 264.

³⁸ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

out would remain seated and off camera, was not expected to maintain viewers' attention, however;³⁹ and the scheduling of the French language debate first was considered to be Mulroney's advantage.⁴⁰ With the format set and the dates marked off on their calendars, the campaigns readied their candidates for the coming face-off.

Leaders' Preparations

"You don't go into in a debate cold," remarks Senator Norman Atkins, the Progressive Conservative campaign co-chair, as he thinks back to 1988. "You have to be prepared for anything that may come up."⁴¹ And prepare their leader the Tories did. The strategists scheduled a two-day break for the prime minister before the English and French debates in order to give him time to rest and study extensive briefing binders. As Fraser reveals, on the evening before the first debate "there was a briefing attended by Derek Burney, Stanley Hartt, Pierre Blais, Lucien Bouchard, Michel Cogger, Hugh Segal, and Lowell Murray. It was not done in the form of role-playing, but Mulroney was drilled with questions about the government's record, free trade, childcare, and other issues that they expected would be raised. In the early evening before the English debate, Murray, Segal, and Burney went over the questions and issues with him."⁴²

NDP leader Ed Broadbent opted for a similar routine. For his debate preparation, he preferred to start with a wide-ranging review of issues with many members of his team, Robin Sears remembers. Once he had dispensed with the generalities, Broadbent would funnel discussion to specifics. On the day of the debates he would review his game plan with just one or two advisors and finally sequester himself with a single advisor in

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fraser, p. 266. In the 1984 French language debate, Mulroney's immutable use of phrases like "chez nous" reminded Quebecers not only that the Tory leader speak the best French of the three, but also that he was one of their own.

⁴¹ Senator Norman Atkins, interview by author, April 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁴² Fraser, p. 266.

the hours before the cameras started rolling.⁴³ For his part, Broadbent noted that he was very comfortable with the format of the leaders' debates, having appeared in the two previous modern versions, and preferred to concentrate on substance rather than style.⁴⁴ "For many years I was conscious of trying to get the right clip," Broadbent says of a politician's preoccupation in the television age, but eventually he developed his own style and pithy and punchy quotes began to come more naturally. Although the NDP leader admits to being somewhat frustrated when a well-researched speech was boiled down to a single glib statement, he soon learned that it was all part of the demands and constraints of post-literate politics. "You can't agonize if they don't quote a whole paragraph," he concedes.

John Turner and his team eschewed this conventional preparation for something more technologically advanced and calculated. Following his calamitous 1984 campaign, one in which the rust the leader accumulated in his years on Bay Street was plain for all to see, Turner sought the help of several image doctors. By 1988, he had retained the services of Henry Comor, formerly a television producer and an actor in London's famous West End theatre district. Comor attempted to give Turner a new arsenal of weapons in his fight for a sympathetic image in front of the country's television cameras. They studied dramatic timing, corrected poor posture and practiced techniques which would assist in conveying the desired message in the debate.⁴⁵ "Purists decry this kind of image doctoring, but it's actually quite healthy," Duffy argues in Fights Of Our Lives. "Turner had to stop creating visual clutter so that viewers could pay attention to what he

⁴³ Sears interview.

⁴⁴ The Hon. Edward Broadbent, interview by author, May 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁴⁵ Graham Fraser writes that "Comor had carefully studied questions of eye contact, communication, body language and reflexive motions: the fact that when one is asked a question that requires thought or reflection, one's eyes move; instinctively, someone who replies to a question without any pause or eye movement appears less thoughtful or reflective," Fraser, p. 271.

was saying. Well-cut suits and proper breathing were necessary for Canadians to give their undistracted attention to Turner's arguments about the country's future."⁴⁶ If the Tories had understood the knack of agenda-setting early in the campaign, then surely the Liberals understood the art of mastering the dynamics of televised debating at this stage.

The Liberal leader's training was put to the test in "a full-scale simulation of the debate in an Ottawa TV studio."⁴⁷ Turner demanded such a set up because it had served him so well in the past. A former trial lawyer, the Liberal leader disclosed that when he wanted to ensure a witness could withstand any assault the opposing lawyer could mount, he would have his client "grilled for two or three hours until the sweat was coming down [his/her] face [and nothing the opposing side would do] could be worse than what [his/her] own lawyer had done."⁴⁸ Two separate mock debates were organized, one for each language, and the Liberal strategists were told to be as unyielding and cutthroat as possible. A working studio was utilized specifically so that Turner could see what he had done right and wrong. As opposed to the informal exchanges and bull sessions the other leaders would utilize in their debate preparations, Turner's method was distinct in its paramount concern for the host medium. In fact, "since he wanted Turner to learn as much as possible from the tape, [Comor] had the television camera focus on him more than it would in the real debate, so that Turner could see the importance of remaining focused and self-aware at all times."⁴⁹

Like bad-tasting medicine that eventually cures an ailment, what Turner saw was not easy to swallow. Coming out of the mock debates, the Liberal leader knew his stand-

⁴⁶ Duffy, p. 336.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Fraser, p. 272.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

ins for Mulroney and Broadbent had hit hard and hit often, but little could prepare him for just how bad his performance had been. “The result [of the first mock debate in English] was, in the word used by several of those who saw the rehearsal, brutal,” writes Fraser.⁵⁰ Following the French dry-run, Turner had to admit his performance had been “a disaster” and that he had been “creamed.”⁵¹ He placed some of the blame on his tardiness in moving from the tangential and gregarious aspects of the campaign mode to the intense focus and piercing arguments of a debate mode. Nonetheless, the Liberal leader and his image consultants were determined that he learn from his mistakes. Never before had a national political leader been so scrupulously tutored for television. They “scrolled for hours through facial close-ups revealing annoying tics and wayward eye movements or outbreaks of throat clearing and hunched-shoulder atrocities,” notes Duffy.⁵²

On the evening of October 24, the three major party leaders walked into Ottawa’s CJOH television studio for the first of two nights of debate. The objectives of each man differed. Mulroney was riding high and needed only to hold off any serious challenge. Broadbent had been steadily gaining momentum at Turner’s expense, and a solid performance could confirm the belief that Campaign ’88 had become a two-way race.⁵³ His handle on his party’s leadership and his electoral prospects dimmed, Turner actually had the most to prove in the match-ups, but also the lowest expectation from the public. Mulroney worriedly told a confidant, “If this guy shows up and makes a nice presentation, he’s going to be canonized.”⁵⁴ Turner planned to do much more than make nice; he planned to resurrect his flagging campaign in one fell swoop. Having fumbled

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 274.

⁵² Duffy, p. 336.

⁵³ *The National*, (Toronto: 20 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁵⁴ Duffy, p. 339.

the agenda-setting at the outset of the campaign, Turner had, by mid-campaign, consciously adapted himself to the imperatives of televised politics.

Inviting Three Party Leaders Into Your Living Room

During the daily grind of any modern campaign, party strategists continually try to lay the groundwork for a perfect clip for television newscasts.⁵⁵ The setting, the words and the delivery are all carefully choreographed during speeches or photo opportunities, but live debates are another matter entirely. Once the spotlight is turned on and the debate begins, a candidate's advisors can only watch alongside every viewer at home. The keenest hope is for the home audience to gain a favourable impression of the politician, have their existing loyalties reinforced or, if they are undecided or not firm in their support for a candidate, prompt them to commit their support. The successful realization of this objective is a two-step process. First, the performance of the debater should instill a positive impression in a home viewer during and immediately following the event. Second, the initial reaction should be either confirmed or challenged by the media's characterization of the debate. The politician's performance and the viewer's personal bias are largely the determining factors in the first step; however, the news media and party strategists will have a large hand in deciding the second.

On both debate nights, John Turner attempted to seize the initiative and dictate the terms of the debate. First off, he followed Mulroney's example from the first day of the campaign and neutralized himself, thereby removing one glaring object from the line of sight of his opponents' attack. "This evening, Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Broadbent are going to talk about leadership of the head of a party when they should be talking about the

⁵⁵ Fraser, p. 179.

leadership of a country,” Turner told the cameras in his opening statement.⁵⁶ To use an analogy from hockey, he had dropped the gloves and was ready to fight. Mulroney responded in kind: “What is at stake next November 21 is, in fact, leadership. I say indeed, the leadership of Canada.”⁵⁷ Over the course of the night, the two would trade barbs over government scandals brought about by the Quebec’s ministers,⁵⁸ free trade, pensions and taxes. Although Mulroney was most at ease speaking French, Turner was able to destabilize him in other ways. “Turner supplemented his verbal attacks with a tactic from his trainer Comor – glaring at Mulroney throughout the debate and, when it was his turn to be seated, remaining standing with a somewhat predatory expression. Mulroney found himself turning his eyes downward to avoid Turner’s gaze, creating the impression that Turner was confident and powerful, Mulroney weak and defensive,” Duffy writes. “Viewers also got the sense that Turner’s confidence stemmed from arguing something he believed in, a fine contrast to the tentativeness shown by the prime minister.”⁵⁹ Fraser notes that a Quebec Conservative watching from his constituency office said Mulroney was at his best on the offense, and his decision to appear statesman-like effectively neutered him.

NDP leader Ed Broadbent faced a different type of challenge from his Liberal opponent. In this debate, Turner’s strategy had been to say as little as possible when paired with Broadbent in order to remind voters that Broadbent’s French was the weakest of the three debaters. Broadbent had won plaudits from the French media following 1984’s debates because he had made a solid effort. His French was even better now, and

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 277.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The focus of the Liberal’s Quebec campaign was largely focused on this record of scandals because free trade was relatively popular in the province. Duffy, p. 340.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

his party appeared to be making tremendous inroads in Quebec, so the standard against what the francophone audience and media measured him was now higher. Some French-language reporters, therefore, described his linguistic performance to be akin to “fingernails on a blackboard.”⁶⁰ In addition to troubles mastering the language of debate, Broadbent made a point of debating the merits of free trade with the prime minister during an early exchange; he took a position that was not popular with Quebec voters, and which Broadbent today feels may have hurt him in the closing weeks of the campaign.⁶¹

Although unilingual anglophone Canadians were not in a position to watch the debate with the same insight as their francophone counterparts, they were able to gauge the outcome through the media’s reaction and analysis.⁶² The time constraints imposed by the television medium made it difficult to give more than a cursory and superficial overview of the evening’s debate. By and large the issues were given relatively short shrift and the personalities of the debaters were front and centre. For this, Turner was the best prepared. Once again, the news media framed the debate in a manner that would be familiar, digestible and exciting for viewers. Building on the priming of the individual leaders that had been accomplished through extensive coverage of the plane tours, the media looked at this event as a type of sporting event and used metaphorical references and specialized diction to impress the point upon viewers.

If the campaign as a whole was one long horse race, the debates could rightly be described as sprint races or the big turn. On October 11, the day the debate format was

⁶⁰ Fraser, p. 278.

⁶¹ Broadbent interview.

⁶² For an interesting passage on how the parties spin doctors try to influence media opinion during debates, please see Fraser, pp. 281-282. See also: Fox, William J., *Spinwars: Politics and New Media*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1999).

announced, CBC anchor Peter Mansbridge began *The National* with a pugnacious sporting phrase. “Well, they’re going to go at it...,” he told home viewers.⁶³ Later, the night of the French debate was similarly detailed with reporting full of sports-related puns and imagery. *The National*’s lead item that evening used a familiar hockey term “face-off” to describe the format.⁶⁴ The supporters and protesters who gathered to greet the leaders as they entered the studio might well be considered as fans gathering rink-side. In fact, reporter Keith Boag noted that the French debate had been called a “home game” for Quebec-born Mulroney, and that people were anxiously waiting for his “head-to-head” with Turner.⁶⁵

When CBC chief political correspondent David Halton was brought on to give viewers an update and analysis, he used comparable language in his brief segment. He contended the debate was “lively,” and noted strong “personal attacks” from the debaters. Halton also suggested that an aloof Mulroney was “trying to be serene, and not getting dragged off his pedestal into a slagging match with the other two.”⁶⁶ In concluding his chat with Halton, Mansbridge returned to the familiar debates-as-a-boxing-match analogy and stated, “Okay, in a couple of words then, no knock-out punches from anyone yet.”⁶⁷ In the third consecutive segment of the broadcast, the audience was introduced to three undecided voters from Quebec invited to watch the debates and tell viewers if it would influence their vote. Reporter Paul Workman explained that the three voters have been watching closely and “keeping score,” and reiterated that “it sounds as if Mr. Turner may

⁶³ *The National*, (Toronto: 11 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

have scored some points” on the issue of acid rain with one participant.⁶⁸ At the time of the interview, all three voters were leaning towards Turner and they were especially impressed with his sincerity. All, in all, it appeared as though Turner was winning over the media and the audience reached by the debate. The question still remained whether he could accomplish the feat twice and excel the following night.

The English Debates: Waiting For The Right Moment To Throw A Hard Punch

In round two, some of the leaders’ strategies were tweaked in reaction to what lessons were perceived to have been learned from the first match-up. Broadbent, much more at ease in English than he was in French, was able to speed up his delivery. He was determined to “demonstrate the prime ministerial demeanour to ensure that, in so doing, he was not shunted aside while Turner and Mulroney blasted away at each other.”⁶⁹ Turner took a decidedly different tact. Far from the blistering attack with which the Liberal leader had opened the French debate, his advisors urged him to conserve his energy for the final hour and initially play possum.⁷⁰ “Mulroney had been surprised by Turner’s strong performance in the French debate, but not enough to change his strategy: appear prime ministerial, take it as it comes, win by not losing,” reports Duffy.⁷¹ Within minutes of the commencement of the English debate, the realignment was on display.

Broadbent, sensing that Turner would use the issue of free trade as his main line of attack decided to beat him to it. Through luck of the draw he was the first leader to speak and he delivered a blistering offensive which co-opted Turner’s line from the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Duffy, p. 340.

⁷⁰ Fraser, p. 283.

⁷¹ Duffy, p. 340.

French debates: “this election is about the future of [the] country.”⁷² Playing to the NDP’s perceived strengths, he argued that “ordinary, average Canadians” would face the prospect of a decline in the standard of their social programs.⁷³ He tore into the prime minister and challenged him to answer questions about how the free trade deal would affect Canadian sovereignty, the environment, families, the healthcare system, pensions, regional development and agricultural programs.⁷⁴ Graham Fraser today describes Broadbent’s opening flurry as “punchy... direct, and ironically – given the criticism [the NDP leader] received later for supposedly ignoring the free-trade issue – it got almost no public attention.”⁷⁵ Following a quick rebuttal from Mulroney, in which the prime minister contended that Broadbent and Turner offered “nothing but the poverty of protectionism,”⁷⁶ as an alternative to the free trade agreement, Turner launched into his opening remarks. Once again he tried to put his leadership troubles behind him by telling Canadians the country’s future was of more importance than his future as Liberal leader.⁷⁷ However, Turner augmented his free trade arguments with a variety of other issues that were intended to put Mulroney on the defensive, notably government ethics. It was this topic debate panelist and CBC personality David Halton seized upon in his first question to Mulroney, as the prime minister and the Liberal leader assumed their places for the initial one-on-one segment.

Harking back to the 1984 debate’s “electrifying” exchange on patronage, Halton asked the prime minister if he did not make just as many, if not more, appointments of

⁷² *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates*, (Ottawa: 25 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National News.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Fraser, p. 283.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁷⁶ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

close friends and party loyalists. Although he now admits the question made Mulroney squirm and gave Turner an opening to reinforce his opening points, Halton and the other reporters on the panel – CTV’s Pamela Wallin and Global Television’s Doug Small – did not play favourites; they used their questions to not only spur debate, but also tackle subjects the leaders preferred to ignore on the campaign trail. One of these topics was exactly what NDP strategists had hoped to downplay or avoid entirely: the party’s position on NATO. Julie Mason had warned the NDP’s election strategists that the party’s policy, which had long advocated pulling out of NATO, was a “potential weakness,”⁷⁸ and Turner took the issue as far as he could. In fact, during the last hour of debate he would come back to the issue and accuse Broadbent of “fudging” his position. This comment visibly angered Broadbent, who had a reputation among Canadians for his honesty and integrity.⁷⁹ “What, what’s fudging,” he challenged, his tone of voice rising ever higher. The NDP leader had been instructed to temper his shrill vocal delivery as far back as the 1984 campaign. “This was particularly noticeable in his second or third question in Question Period, when his voice would rise in nerve-grating exasperation,” writes Fraser. “[Two advisors] put together a video cassette which spliced all of his shrillest questions together to show Broadbent what they meant. Just as he had learned to change his tailoring – dropping his trademark corduroy jacket – and fix the gap in his teeth, he learned to modulate his voice.”⁸⁰ In the heat of the debate, however, the old habit resurfaced and it was magnified when television producers chose to use the clip on their broadcasts. By showing frustration and engaging in heated debate when the subject

⁷⁸ Fraser, p. 133.

⁷⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 16 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁸⁰ Fraser, p. 118.

was mentioned, Broadbent not only highlighted an issue which he needed to downplay, but he also came across at his most flustered and distracting. In short, he had failed to make the transition to televised politics as Turner had done. While Turner stood back and smiled his opponent wagged his finger angrily and stumbled over his words.⁸¹

By the end of two hours of debate all three men had performed reasonably well under immense and intense pressure. Each had made some strong arguments, but had also come under intense scrutiny and fire from opponents. Turner was in his last head-to-head confrontation with Mulroney when, according to the advice given to him beforehand, he took one final run at the free trade agreement. He had broached the issue several times in the evening never quite drawing Mulroney to let down his guard. Watching the event unfold at home, Henry Comor telephoned the Liberal strategists imploring them to tell his pupil to let loose. "You can tell him he's lost," Fraser reports Comor as saying. "He's got nothing to lose. He's got to be relaxed, and fire with all his guns. Nothing terrible can happen any more; this is the end of it."⁸² This encounter would be his last opportunity of the night to speak about an issue he would later call the cause of his life. Ironically, it was not the Liberal leader who would have to fight for an opening: television executives would serve one to him on a platter. Global Television's Laszlo Bastyovansky told other representatives of the consortium of broadcasters holding the debates that he believed there had not been enough discussion about free trade. They agreed and sent a note to the panelists asking them to raise the issue one more time.⁸³ Once again the television media was setting the election's agenda, albeit somewhat accidentally.

Again Turner began with his "lawyer's argument that the deal had given too much

⁸¹ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates.*

⁸² Fraser, p. 288-289.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

away for too little in return,”⁸⁴ and again Mulroney swatted back. Finally, Turner took a page from his popular campaign stump speech and accused Mulroney of selling out the country. Any civility that had existed between the two men melted away as Mulroney returned the accusation of treason with a withering counterassault. “You do not have a monopoly on patriotism,” the prime minister thundered as Turner tried to continue. “I resent the fact of your implication that only you are a Canadian. I want to tell you that I come from a Canadian family and I love Canada and that’s why I did it – to promote prosperity – and don’t you impugn my motives.”⁸⁵ The two men fought a war of words back and forth, Turner trying to make his point and Mulroney interrupting him and furiously denying it.

“At this point, Turner stepped out from behind his lectern,” writes Duffy. “This aggressive, menacing move (which he and Comor had worked out on the weekend) was clearly intended to cow Mulroney in the studio. On television it created an even more powerful effect. The cameras, fixed in their angles according to debate rules, no longer showed two men of roughly equal height taking up roughly equal on-screen space. Now, the shot looking over Turner’s back at Mulroney was dominated by the spread of the opposition leader’s muscular, flexing shoulders and it made the figure of Mulroney small, almost cringing by comparison. When the camera reversed angles to Mulroney’s point of view, it showed Turner draw up to full height, then step out from behind his lectern. On screen he towered over Mulroney, his blue eyes flashing like an avenging angel’s. By revealing his entire body before the cameras, Turner conveyed the crucial message about

⁸⁴ Duffy, p. 341.

⁸⁵ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates*.

trust: I have nothing to hide.”⁸⁶

Finally, Turner was able to spit out more than a few words without Mulroney bellowing over him. “We built a country east and west and north,” the Liberal leader said solemnly. “We built it on an infrastructure that deliberately resisted the continental pressure of the United States. For 120 years we have done it. With one signature of a pen, you have reversed that, thrown us into the north-south influence of the United States, and will reduce us I’m sure to a colony of the United States. Because when the economic levers go, the political independence is sure to follow.”⁸⁷ When Mulroney noted the deal could be cancelled within six months of giving notice, Turner was dumbfounded. “Cancelable? You are talking about our relationship with the United States,”⁸⁸ he contended. No, Mulroney replied, it was just a commercial document. Again Turner was flabbergasted. “Commercial document?” he parroted. “It relates to every facet of our lives!”⁸⁹ Clearly weary of Turner’s entire line of reasoning, Mulroney implored the Liberal leader to be serious. “Well I am serious,” Turner retorted. “And I’ve never been more serious in my life.”⁹⁰ Turner had delivered the electric moment in the debate, a moment that spoke to his apparent sincerity on the free trade issue, but also a moment that certainly revealed his pre-debate coaching in television politics.

CBC senior parliamentary editor Don Newman and *The National* anchor Peter Mansbridge had been watching the event proceedings from their studios in preparation for the broadcast that would immediately follow the debate. “I was in my office and Peter was down at the back watching it in an edit suite,” Newman recalls. “We were beginning

⁸⁶ Duffy, p. 341.

⁸⁷ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

to wonder.... One of the things... slotted in was 'the big moment of the debate,' [and] this is the last half hour of the debate. [After] the first hour or hour and a half,⁹¹ we said 'gee, we have a slot for a big moment, I don't know if there's been a big moment.' So we turned back to watching and suddenly Turner said this, and we both said to each other 'That's it!'"⁹² Having covered the 1984 debate when Mulroney lambasted his opponent over patronage in an "electrifying" exchange, Newman intuitively knew what he was looking for. The panelists in the studio realized the magnitude of the confrontation as well. Doug Small, the next panelist called upon ask a question told moderator Rosalie Abella that he'd be happy to let the two men continue.⁹³

Ed Broadbent, sitting quietly and waiting for his next at-bat with Turner, could only watch the fireworks. "In fact, I said to myself, because I witnessed that in the studio, I said that's going to be major news. But to put it in historical context, I never believed Turner was opposed to free trade. Never! He took weeks or months longer than us before the election to make a decision. I couldn't believe the Liberal party would be opposed to this. And sure enough, shortly afterwards, they approved the deal. So it shows how distorting the debates can be."⁹⁴ What Broadbent had in fact witnessed was not a moment of political sincerity, but instead a perfect piece of political posturing in the television age and Turner had read the script with expertise. Although the NDP leader was scheduled to be a part of the last two one-on-one encounters, the free trade agreement was not mentioned in either segment. It probably would not have mattered. The news programs had their clip and there was little to suggest anything that followed

⁹¹ Newman's timing is slightly off. The exchange came at the beginning of the third hour of debate.

⁹² Newman interview.

⁹³ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates*.

⁹⁴ Broadbent interview.

would be as explosive.

Reflecting back on the exchange, Halton, who was in the studio, says he believes Turner finally struck the right chord with people and phrased his argument in a way they could understand. “He was highly dramatic and hyperbolic in arguing the country’s future would be at stake. He was able to convey the impression that he was very passionate about it and the stakes were high. On that score, I think he out-debated Mulroney on that issue,” Halton attests. “He distilled his comments and telescoped them in that two or three minute exchange. I think by marshalling passion, commitment and giving Canadians the impression that in a real way this was a hugely important issue and by wrapping himself in the flag the way he did, it came across in the press as a performance.”⁹⁵ The former debate panelist also says he believes Mulroney made a tactical mistake in saying the agreement was cancelable in six months. “That appeared to make it seem as though it was just a trade agreement to Mulroney whereas Turner saw it as much more important,” Halton explains, adding that Mulroney might have been successful if he had responded to the patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric Turner used. “He did to an extent, but it was blurred by the commercial document quip and six months notice.”⁹⁶

As the debate came to an end, the leaders stood in front of their podiums for closing remarks. Although the debate may have changed the dynamics of the campaign, the leaders remained resolutely wedded to the campaign themes their strategists had designed for them through careful polling and focus group analysis. Mulroney read his statement from several sheets of paper with large font. Although likely easier to see, the

⁹⁵ David Halton, interview by author, April 24 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

frequent page-turning was very noticeable and distracting. "The election is about choices," he concluded. "It's about challenges and it's about change. It's about which party and which leader is competent in your judgment to manage the economy and direct federal-provincial relations and conduct foreign policy. It's about which team of men and women is best able to lead this country into the 1990s. It's about an agenda for our country and a vision of Canada in a new decade and a new century."⁹⁷ He ended his pitch to the electorate by looking directly into camera and asking Canadians for their hand and their help.

Broadbent, who looked intently into the cameras and glanced at his notes as infrequently as possible, stumbled and tripped over his words, but came across as earnest and dedicated. He told Canadians that Mulroney tried to justify a poor performance in the past four years while Turner reversed himself on positions he had while prime minister. In reminding viewers that leadership is an important quality to consider, he told viewers that he did not have trouble making choices and would always look out for the average Canadian. "I promise to you to work day in, day out, week in, week out for the average family in this country," he stated. "It's time the average person finally counted. That's what I'm all about."⁹⁸

Turner closed by telling the audience that the election offered a choice between the "big government of NDP" which decides everything for citizens, and a Conservative government that "will let the U.S. make every decision."⁹⁹ Returning to free trade, an issue which he had been giving an increased profile, Turner said that 80 per cent of everything that crosses the border is already free trade, and to get the other 20 per cent

⁹⁷ *Encounter '88: English Leaders' Debates.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Mulroney was willing to give up Canada's ability to control its economy and destiny. "Our energy resources will make us a continental reservoir to the U.S.," he prophesized. "Under the deal, any business worth up to \$150 million can be taken over and we can't say a thing about it. Farmers will be at the mercy of U.S. farmers."¹⁰⁰ Comor's training proved to be particularly effective as he spoke; his dramatic pauses and measured speech would not have been out of place on a stage or a movie screen – it was an emotional appeal with Turner seeming to choke up. "I don't believe my feelings are any different than yours," he continued, using the power of the medium to personalize his spin on the issue. "We have something special here: a way of life, a way of looking at ourselves a way of reacting to the world. Mr. Mulroney's trade deal will change all that. It will make us little more than a junior partner of the United States. I believe in a strong, united and independent Canada. I believe we are now talented enough, confident enough and tough enough to make our own choices for our own future in our own way. I need your support on November 21. You and I must not allow Mr. Mulroney to sell us out, to reverse 120 years of Canadian history, to destroy the Canadian dream."¹⁰¹

As the credits rolled and each debater shook their opponents' hands and the hands of the moderator and panelists, the national television news crews were counting down the seconds to air time. Canadians who watched the debate at home would have a brief respite before the media began to analyze the event and put it in context. That night on *The National*, neither Peter Mansbridge nor any of his colleagues would see fit to declare a winner; they would let the clips speak for themselves.

After a terrible start to the campaign, where badly mismanaged agenda-setting

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

efforts with the earned mass media hurt the Liberals in the published opinion polls and damaged the morale of the troops, the party's second phase of agenda-setting initiatives proved to be many times more effective with the public. Initially, poor execution of the campaign theme and planned photo opportunities permitted an unforgiving media filter to cast Liberal leader John Turner – already a shaky leader – as a bumbling man surrounded by partisans who did not support him. In contrast, the earned media campaigns of the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats, if not flawless, were overwhelmingly proficient at setting a desired agenda and furthering a campaign theme. These two parties were undoubtedly assisted by leaders who understood the demands of television or, at the very least, trusted their advisors to construct a smart campaign.

The two major televised components of the second phase of the campaign helped to bring about a Liberal renaissance, however. The party's television advertising campaign seized upon the medium's audio-visual capabilities to present a message that struck at the heart of latent Canadian nationalism and shifted the debate over free trade from one of economics and advancement to that of Canadian sovereignty and identity. The advertisement's lasting impact was braced by Turner's dramatic performance in the leaders' debates. Whatever his shortcomings when faced by the news media, when the Liberal leader stood alongside Mulroney and Broadbent in that television studio, he proved he had mastered the medium's dynamics. His coaching, his rehearsal, his study of tapes and subsequent refinement, his day-to-day strategy, and his all-encompassing mission to be a part of *the* clip showed the potency of the televised exchange of political views and the rewards that would go to the candidate who understood these dynamics. Simply put, he who prepares for political debate in the television age and respects the

power of the medium will gain the upper hand. The question still remained, however, whether he could ride this perfect wave to election day or whether it would quickly dissipate.

Chapter Seven: Neck And Neck As It Comes Down To The Finish Line

“Good evening from Parliament Hill in Ottawa,” Peter Mansbridge said as he welcomed viewers to *The National*, many of whom who had just witnessed the English language debate on October 25. “Well, it was quite a night. They fired away at close range tonight, hoping to get their shots in while dodging the ones aimed their way. The weapons were words. For the second night in a row Brian Mulroney, John Turner and Ed Broadbent hammered away at each other in a television debate.”¹ Mansbridge, who reminded viewers that Turner was seen to have a “good night” in the French debate the previous night, suggested that at times this evening “there was quiet and careful discussion of the issues,” while on occasion “there was the crackle of confrontation.”² Ceding to television’s need for the dramatic, the quiet and careful debate post-mortem was left for later and the “sharpest set-to” was the top priority.³ “Mulroney and Turner in a clash over free trade, the central issue of this election; it was a clash that almost turned into a shouting match,”⁴ the anchor noted, before the entire two-and-a-half minute exchange between the prime minister and the leader of the Official Opposition was played. Television was, by this very act of selection, obliging the nation to abide by its agenda – its ordering of the evening’s events.

“By showing it first you’re saying it’s the big moment,” Don Newman confirms today.⁵ By virtue of its placement in the newscast’s line-up, viewers are implicitly impressed with the nature of its importance. A useful comparison comes by way of the

¹ *The National*, (Toronto: 25 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

² Ibid.

³ Duffy says, unlike the morning’s newspaper which were uncommitted, “the television networks knew a ratings grabber when they saw one,” John Duffy, *Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership and the Making of Canada*, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 345.

⁴ *The National*, (Toronto: 25 October, 1988).

⁵ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

nightly newscast's closest relative, the daily newspaper. Much like the editors of a periodical who organize content in thematic sections and use headlines, visual elements and spatial consideration to bring a hierarchal order to the publication, television producers construct their story line-up with a mind to news values. A top story on the nightly news is imbued with the same significance as a front-page, right-hand side, above-the-fold story in a newspaper. When reading a newspaper, the (Western) eye is drawn instinctively to right-hand pages and a premium is placed on the space above the fold of a broadsheet or in the top right corner of a tabloid. It is exactly this eye-catching, curiosity-feeding command of leaders that, media observers now remark, CNN and its "instant news" partners (and now the Internet) have taken away from the newspaper. Robbed on first-catch attention, many newspapers have increasingly turned themselves into magazines – the purveyors of in-depth stories. Similarly, the first news item in a broadcast, following brief highlights, or headlines, is acknowledged as the prime air time for a report.

Media-savvy party strategists immediately saw the writing on the wall, or in this case, the screen. As Fraser reveals, when NDP advisor "Hilarie McMurray came into one of the rooms the party had been allotted, she found Robin Sears slumped in a chair. He had just seen the Turner-Mulroney clip on the news, and he knew that it would be the memorable moment of the debate; the clip would be played and replayed until it was the only thing anyone remembered of the three hours. And Ed Broadbent was not in it."⁶ Looking back at the debate format, Sears says it could best be described as "the more, the

⁶ Graham Fraser. *Playing For Keeps: The Making Of The Prime Minister, 1988*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), p. 292.

less merry.”⁷ Having more than two debaters is “not good” and having more than three is “a disaster” because “It’s very hard for everybody to deliver a message effectively in that confused a setting.”⁸ When a key exchange happens while a party’s candidate is the odd-man out, that party’s message is muted to an even greater degree in the post-debate media reinforcement phase. One reaction to this trap has been for parties to “spin” their candidate’s performance, to apply a positive gloss to comments and actions that may not have initially had dramatic appeal.

Having tacitly informed viewers what *The National*’s producers believed to be the most important exchange, Mansbridge and his guest, Newman, chose not to directly tell viewers whom they believed “won” the exchange or the overall debate. As Mansbridge confessed to Newman, “I certainly wouldn’t want to predict a winner on that exchange.” Instead, he asked the CBC’s senior parliamentary editor what it accomplished “aside from the smoke and fire.”⁹ Newman further stressed its importance by noting “it certainly was *the* exchange on *the* issue [emphasis added, but also his in terms of expression].”¹⁰ The parliamentary editor described it as “full of emotion, rather than fact, which, [he hypothesized], is probably the way most Canadians will end up deciding how to vote on free trade anyway.”¹¹ More importantly, in Newman’s opinion, it was just the burst of energy Turner seemed to need. “Last night seemed to be Turner’s night, but today he had been performing very poorly until he got to that exchange,” he suggested. “And the interesting thing is that Mulroney kind of led him into it. The prime minister was cruising along on free trade and suddenly John Turner jumped in demanding another

⁷ Robin Sears, interview by author, March 24, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 25 October, 1988).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

debate on free trade. They ended up arguing what their parents and grandparents had done, and the prime minister and the leader of the opposition were standing toe-to-toe, waving fingers at each other. Really, a big exchange that got John Turner back into the game in a debate he hadn't been doing very well in."¹² Historians, one could argue, would be hard pressed to isolate any more electric a moment in Canadian electoral history. Never had a campaign turned on such a single dramatic exchange. Macdonald's unveiling of the "treasonous" Farrer pamphlet¹³ in 1891 certainly changed the course of that free trade election, but it had nowhere near the impact of the electronic drama of the Turner-Mulroney exchange in 1988.

Writing Off The NDP And Quickly Forgetting About The Rest Of The Debate

Sears, already disappointed in the television media's determination of "the clip," could hardly be inspired by *The National's* choice of clip to represent his candidate. Although Newman submitted that "for most of the evening, Ed Broadbent performed very well, much better than he had in French... illustrating that the language problem was a big one for him last night,"¹⁴ the CBC played a clip of the NDP leader's exchange with Turner on the NATO question in which Broadbent was on the defensive. "One of the things the Liberals wanted to do was to portray the NDP as a radical party, one with a radical defence policy," Newman reminded viewers. "They wanted to discuss the NATO pullout, or the alleged NATO pullout as Turner was making it tonight, of the NDP. And

¹² Ibid.

¹³ According to James Marsh, in *Historica's* "Election of 1891: A Question of Loyalty," "On February 17, at a great rally in Toronto, [Macdonald] revealed an ace up his sleeve. It was a half dozen press sheets from a pamphlet written by Liberal sympathizer Edward Farrer advising Americans on how they could pressure Canada into political union. After that revelation, Laurier could only watch the old master drive the point home all along the campaign trail." James Marsh, "Election of 1891: A Question of Loyalty," *Historica* (Toronto, Historica Foundation), available from <http://www.historica.ca/prodev/article.do;jsessionid=5C09DE0DF6DBDBE99CAE40783E22CBBC.tomcat1?id=15356>, Internet.

¹⁴ *The National*, (Toronto: 25 October, 1988).

in the last hour, again, Mr. Turner seemed to screw up his courage and go after both Mulroney and Broadbent, and he did get Broadbent to agree that yes the NDP will take Canada out of NATO.”¹⁵ Thus, though performing well throughout the night, one of Broadbent’s weaker moments on a weak issue for the party was accentuated by TV reporters. Newman’s words may have told a more complete version of events, but the pictures chosen spoke louder than his words and they unanimously cast Broadbent as “loser” of the match-up.

The CBC’s broadcast devoted two lengthy spots in its line-up for summaries of important topics and exchanges in the first and second hours of the debate, but the two clips they singled out for independent and primary mention both featured Turner in aggressive and triumphant exchanges. Virtually everything else was an afterthought – a medley of the debate’s greatest hits hurriedly delivered by reporters who seemed as though they had a bus to catch, each point melding into the next. As they had in the French debate, a couple of undecided voters were again filmed watching the debate. A man and a woman from Manitoba did not have any incisive or salient points to make but each picked Turner as the night’s “winner.”

Finally, David Halton, having left the debate studio to join Mansbridge, was asked to offer his views on the night. Like the CBC anchor, Newman and the other on-air personalities, Halton did not see fit to call a winner. He reasoned that as reporters for a public broadcaster, no one wanted to be seen as playing favourites or having partisan loyalties.¹⁶ Moreover, he felt he had an obligation not to influence opinion immediately.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This perhaps indicates that the horse race metaphor was the most crass and subjective of the new tools employed in setting up and describing an election and, therefore, one that the media soon eschewed.

¹⁷ David Halton interview

In addition, referencing the peculiarities of the medium, he said he believed that as someone who witnessed the event from the studio, he might have a different interpretation than home viewers who were privy to camera angles or close-up on facial expressions. “You don’t see the screen,” he says. “It does give a slightly different perspective depending on what cutaways are shown. Those little cutaways can really shape people’s views.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the midst of generalities and platitudes, Halton also noted that Mulroney seemed to “lose his cool” when debating free trade with Turner.¹⁹

As in the debate itself, the last word of *The National* went to the leaders themselves, who were leaving the studio for home. Both Broadbent and Turner were still in a fighting mood and continued to attack the prime minister’s handling of free trade. For his part, Mulroney told reporters that he felt he had a strong night, and after six hours of debate over two days, he thought “the Canadian people are just about ready to cry uncle.”²⁰ The impact of the debates and the fallout from the leaders’ performances was just beginning, however. Within days the entire campaign would be turned upside down.

Post-Debate Opinion Shifts

Despite Sears’ fears of the damage the choice of clips on the post-debate newscasts would have on public opinion, his leader was upbeat about the NDP’s prospects. Although he cedes that memories can often be tricky, Broadbent today remembers “on the night of the debate itself, either by means of an instant poll across

¹⁸ David Halton interview. One example of this occurs during the famous Mulroney-Turner exchange over free trade. During their exchange, the camera occasionally cut to shots of moderator Rosalie Abella looking on intently as the men verbally grappled. In other instances during this exchange, as previously mentioned, the camera behind Mulroney appeared to reveal him as much smaller when Turner stepped out to approach him. *The Leader’s Debates*.

¹⁹ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

²⁰ Ibid.

Canada, or an instant audience poll, on either one of the two major networks, CBC or CTV, or on both, I was declared the winner of the debate by ordinary Canadians.”²¹ The results confirmed what he had believed all along. “In my overall view of the debates, the whole period of time, I did, to put it euphemistically, as well or better than anyone else on a whole range of issues,” he says, unabashedly.²² “During the period leading up to [the debates], our whole campaign strategy had been working well. We were in second place. And then after the debates we started to decline and the Liberals went up.”²³

Broadbent ties the change in his and the party’s fortunes to “the debate, but more precisely the interpretation of the debate by the media itself – newspaper, radio and television journalists – the spin, the interpretation they put on the debate had, on balance, a negative effect on where we were going and a positive effect on the way the Liberals were going.”²⁴ Had the debates run without comment or follow-up coverage from reporters, the NDP leader postulates that public opinion would have coalesced in a different manner. “But the emphasis that turned out of the debates [did not permit that to occur],” he testifies. “They take one or two clips of the debate – they being journalists – and then categorize the whole debate in terms of that clip. So [they took] the clip between John Turner and Mulroney, where Turner was looking very aggressive on the free trade issue and he emerged in the minds of a number of journalists as the winner. And that contributed, in my opinion, to a decline for us.”²⁵ The categorization of the debate as a win-lose proposition based on one key exchange is a clear instance of framing by the

²¹ The Hon. Edward Broadbent, interview by author, May 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

media.²⁶ Although news programs like *The National* and *The Journal* produced extended analytical pieces, the decision to use the Mulroney-Turner confrontation as the clip to represent the whole of the debate ensured that the viewing audience would come to see the debate, and by extension, the election itself, as one where free trade super-ceded all other issues.

In fact, viewers who watched the debates²⁷ and the hour of news and current events programming on the CBC that followed would see and/or hear about the exchange between Turner and Mulroney no less than six times in two hours.²⁸ The next day, during *The National*'s top story (which described nationwide reaction to the English debates), the clip was played again; and in a story on the resumption of Turner's tour, there was a clip of the Liberal leader making reference to the Mulroney response.²⁹ If the television

²⁶ As Mendelsohn explains: "Winning and losing are the frames which glue together stories. Campaigns are interpreted as a game played for personal advantage and simply a choice of leadership. The language and culture of television encourages campaigns to be portrayed as war, as a game, as drama, but rarely as a competition between alternate visions.... Leaders and the horserace become interchangeable. Leaders are judged on the basis of the criteria established by the horserace. The need to 'perform well,' the need to 'be strong,' 'relaxed,' 'confident,' 'pleased,' etc., as opposed to 'weak,' 'nervous,' 'troubled,' 'beleaguered,' etc., become television's litmus tests for good leadership." Matthew Mendelsohn, "Television's Frames in the 1988 Canadian Election," *Canadian Journal of Communication [Online]*, 18, no. 2. (January 1993), available from: <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=165>, Internet. He adds: "Winning and losing are the frames which glue together stories. Campaigns are interpreted as a game played for personal advantage and simply a choice of leadership. The language and culture of television encourages campaigns to be portrayed as war, as a game, as drama, but rarely as a competition between alternate visions."

²⁷ According to figures compiled by A.C. Neilson Co. of Canada Ltd., an estimated 3,889,000 viewers tuned in at some point during the CBC telecast of the three-hour debate and 2,246,000 watched at least part on CTV. Numbers for the Global Television Network, based in Ontario, were not available. The average audience for the debate, when measured in quarter-hour segments, was 4,045,000 or 50 per cent of TV sets in use that night. By way of comparison, one million more viewers tuned in for the English debates than watched Ben Johnson's Olympic run. The French debate also received a substantial audience of approximately 1,857,000 in quarter-hour surveys of Radio-Canada and TVA. "Six million watched debate in English by 3 party leaders," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 November, 1988, p. A8.

²⁸ First in the actual debates, then as the first piece of footage on *The National*, then in a discussion between Mansbridge and Newman, once more in Mansbridge's talk with Halton, again in its entirety as a part of *The Journal*'s coverage, and finally as part of a discussion between Barbara Frum and pollster Donna Dasko.

²⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 26 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The. Reporter Anna Maria Tremonti, temporarily covering the Liberal tour, noted: "Turner seems to think he found the opening he needed in his fight against the free trade deal. He ridiculed Mulroney twice today for calling it a mere commercial document. It's a line of attack he's likely to use over and over in the final few weeks of the

newscasts incessant playing of the clip were not enough, the Liberals believed footage from the exchange would make for an effective campaign commercial. Although the consortium of broadcasters refused to grant the use of the debates to the party for this purpose, the resulting court challenge of this privilege by the Liberals was newsworthy enough to ensure the clip remained prescient.

The continual replaying and discussion of the exchange had more than one implication, however. In addition to further priming two leaders to be seen as the most heated and bitter rivals of all the combatants and accentuating their intense emotions on the issue of free trade, it also permitted journalists to seize hold of the campaign's narrative and frame the ballot-box question as a veritable referendum on the agreement itself.³⁰ In another sense, reporters were now able to read the Liberal script without being distracted by internal feuding or incessant problems on the campaign trail. The prime minister, who had been kept as a caged bird throughout most of the first few weeks of the election period, was now set among the hungry cats that wished to press him on the issue. Finally, NDP leader Ed Broadbent, whose party had carefully promoted him as their brand, was offside on the issue, especially for television's purposes. He had campaigned on the issue, but in following the party's strategy, he had not owned the issue. In contrast, Turner, who had increasingly used the issue as the centerpiece of his speeches, had called it the "cause of his life," and impressed his passion upon Canadians. Notwithstanding their policy differences on the subject, for the intents and purposes of the media, both men and their respective parties appeared to be on the same side of the issue while

campaign."

³⁰ It should be noted that the media's agenda-setting function was not necessarily intentional, and possibly accidental or in response to the public's interest. For instance, Maude Barlow argues the Canadian people set the agenda: "The strategists could tell when they looked at the polls and saw this would be a winning issue for John Turner, and it would have been if they hadn't split the vote with the NDP." Maude Barlow, interview by author, April 18, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

Mulroney and his Conservatives were on the other. One of the two opposition parties would get short shrift. "The election turned into an up or down vote on free trade, and certainly the debates contributed to that or reinforced that,"³¹ Broadbent acquiesces, and, unfortunately for his party, the newly-visible momentum of the Liberals virtually ensured they would become the champions of the anti-free trade forces. Thus, despite the New Democrats' and Progressive Conservatives' best efforts to downplay the agreement in the first phase of the campaign, a one-two punch by the Liberal television advertising campaign and John Turner's electric debate performance halted these parties' momentum. The news media, with particular help from the television networks' desire for an emotional and dramatic campaign, were now able to substantiate and bolster the Liberal counterattack by framing the contest in a completely different manner. Whereas in the first few weeks of the campaign the parties and media seemed to be generally framing the ballot-box question to be about leadership and vision, it now had become one which asked voters to decide on the type of Canada they wanted: a prosperous, global player or a sovereign and distinct nation.

Free Trade Tops The Agenda

Prominent anti-free trade activist Maude Barlow didn't mind the extra assistance at all. Barlow, the national chairperson of the Council of Canadians who had also unsuccessfully sought a Liberal nomination in an Ottawa riding, had been marshalling opponents to the deal since negotiations were first announced. As the party leaders set about the daily exercise of running an election campaign, Barlow's forces were doing battle with free trade supporters such as Thomas D'Aquino and his Business Council on

³¹ Broadbent interview.

National Issues in a type of concurrent shadow campaign.³² The anti-free trade coalition was aghast at Conservative and NDP attempts to make the free trade agreement one issue among many to consider when voting; worse still, their analysis of the early part of the campaign suggested the narratives these parties were writing for the media were much more widely read by the public than the more single-minded focus they desired. “A lot of us wanted free trade to be *the* issue earlier [emphasis added],” Barlow says of her supporters, thus advocating the power of framing. “But when John Turner decided to make it *the* major issue of his debate with Mulroney, that’s when it really took off. When he and Mulroney had that famous back-and-forth that really dealt with it and from then on it was the *only* issue. It was always an issue, but it really became an issue in the last few weeks of the campaign.”³³

A review of the continuing media coverage of the debate certainly buttresses her argument. In the days following the French and English debates, the tour reports that all three party leaders broadcast on *The National* predominantly featured clips of the men speaking about their own free trade agreement views or comments their opponents made with regards to the deal. Mulroney argued about the benefits it would have in terms of job creation and scoffed at Turner’s remark in the French debates that the creation of 250,000 new jobs was “marginal.” Clips of Turner found him ridiculing the prime minister for suggesting the agreement was simply a “commercial document” that was cancelable on six months notice. On balance, Broadbent was on the defensive for several days; first, his income tax policy, which put a heavier burden on people earning more than \$65,000 a

³² *The Journal* held a two-day debate featuring the two on October 17 and 18. Again, Barlow says “*The Journal* wouldn’t have put a two night special on if it hadn’t been that passionate and historic.” Barlow interview. She remembers Barbara Frum saying that this was a historic night because it was being held in the same place where Confederation was debated. She says felt a sense that history was being made, and it would change the direction of the country.

³³ Barlow interview.

year, came under fire during a television interview, then a quotation he had used during a free trade segment in the debates from the president of the Canadian Manufacturers Association was discovered to be eight years old and not reflective of the man's current beliefs.³⁴ One week after the debates, Peter Mansbridge introduced the evening's national newscast by saying, "It's an issue most Canadians say they do not understand, and perhaps because of that it has become *the* issue of the campaign: free trade."³⁵

Consensus now suggested that the script of Campaign '88 had been rewritten half-way through – a crucial indication of the power of the media in the electronic age; minor characters and subplots were jettisoned, and one of the leading roles had been recast. Liberal leader John Turner, who had spent much of the initial campaign as a tragic Pagliacci-like character, had become a white knight for the anti-free trade forces. To them, he was now Captain Canada to Mulroney's villainous American shill. Pro-free traders would see the play unfolding in front of them differently, however. In their eyes Mulroney was the country's economic saviour, fighting the evil protectionists who desired to keep Canada as the economic backwater they considered it to be. In each competing script, Broadbent had assumed the role of a hapless side-kick, destined to be an also-ran.

"I think the media contributed to the view that a) it was all about free trade and b) that it was between the Liberals and the Conservatives," Broadbent says, upon reflection. "We were increasingly seen as a minor fighter in that macro context, whereas in the

³⁴ CBC The National, Oct. 27, 1988: Wendy Mesley, now temporarily assigned to the NDP campaign noted, "The reporters following Ed Broadbent used to complain of boredom. Until today. Now there's a whiff of controversy. Reporters couldn't wait to ask him if he was going to apologize to business leaders who are accusing him of misrepresenting them."

³⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 2 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

previous few years we were seen as a major player.”³⁶ In its leader’s opinion, by the end of the campaign the NDP was not doing as well in the media presentation. “They were reinforcing their own story,” he recalls.³⁷ The news media, governed primarily by television needs, had decided the debates had made this contest a two-horse race and the NDP might as well be dispatched to the glue factory. This view, reinforced by polling numbers which showed the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives now neck-in-neck and the New Democrats a distant third, were propagated relentlessly in the following weeks.

“I think it became a referendum,” Barlow submits, “and for any referendum the leader that best articulates his view is going to help you decide on that referendum.... This was a really intense time when Canadians were having a debate about who they were vis-à-vis the United States, about who they were vis a vis their own history, how much control did they want, what would it mean for cultural industries. This was a really passionate and powerful debate that people took to heart and took very seriously.”³⁸ If there is one lesson to be learned from the television media’s choice of clip to represent the debates, it is clear that a premium was placed on passion. Whether his passion for the issue was genuine or concocted, as Broadbent believed, there was little doubt that Turner’s message was being devoured by the media and disseminated across the country’s television screens.

As distressing a scenario as this change in momentum was for the NDP, it was catastrophic for the governing Conservatives. Only days before the debates there was speculation that the party might win even more seats than they had won in the 1984 Tory

³⁶ Broadbent interview.

³⁷ Broadbent interview.

³⁸ Barlow interview.

landslide. Now, the party was fighting to maintain the status quo and losing. Polls showed a tremendous bounce for the Liberals in the post-debate period and a corresponding decline for both other major parties.³⁹ Aside from bleeding votes away from their opponents, the Liberals had energized their own supporters. In an interview with the CBC, Verna Begg, an elderly woman who resided in a senior's home Turner visited the day after the English debate, told reporter Anna Maria Tremonti: "I was always more or less a Liberal, but I was sliding down there. But now I'm right back at the top."⁴⁰ It was a sentiment Fraser reported Liberal candidates were feeling as they knocked on doors and attended boisterous party rallies.⁴¹

And it was a piece of information Tory pollster Allan Gregg had uncovered in his latest research. "Do you realize we were doing focus groups on Thursday" – the English debate had been on the Tuesday night – "and the people were feeding back to us, verbatim, John Turner's arguments against free trade,"⁴² he told author Robert Mason Lee, with amazement. "The effect of the television debate was that it moved all that millennial anxiety about the future to the realization that they'd found the Beast – the Beast is free trade."⁴³ Gregg found that Turner, aided by media echoing of his famous exchange, had transformed a commercial document into a talisman that represented a source of all fears, and suddenly the Conservatives, instead of managing a "packet of vague fears," as Gregg said, "came to represent that packet."⁴⁴ In this classic example of

³⁹ One poll showed 16 per cent of NDP voters and 14 percent of Conservative voters were more likely to vote for the Liberals as a result of the debate.

⁴⁰ *The National*, (Toronto: 26 October, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁴¹ Fraser, p. 294-297.

⁴² Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*. (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 212.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

news media-based priming, the public's fears about free trade were transferred to the party and leader promoting the agreement. When Gregg met with the senior Conservative strategists three days after the English debate, he summed up his findings with the simple, yet devastating, words: "Guys, we've got some serious problems here."⁴⁵

The Conservative Counterattack: Going Negative

Gregg also believed he had a potential solution. Turner had used the platform of the debates to resurrect his battered image. His performance, combined with subsequent media priming of his leadership in the anti-free trade coalition, had removed an enormous anchor from the Liberals' ship and allowed it to really unfurl its sails.⁴⁶ To sink the Liberal vessel, or at least stop it from gaining any more wind in its sails, Gregg needed to re-attach that anchor. He explained it in this way to Lee in *100 Monkeys*: "Voters... select political leaders much as they choose lawyers or doctors. They are willing to put decisions on complex issues in the hands of professionals, but first must have a relationship of trust."⁴⁷ As Richard Johnston's national election study would later find, the Liberal leader's trust rating increased by 9 points following the debates while Mulroney's dropped by 10. Gregg suggested that since "the bridge between the fears of free trade and John Turner is John Turner's credibility [the Tories must] bomb the bridge."⁴⁸ Once again, the strategy proposed would depend heavily on its media

⁴⁵ Duffy, p. 346.

⁴⁶ Barry McLoughlin, an Ottawa-based media consultant, told *The National* that Turner's performance in the English debate "established him, rather than Ed Broadbent, as the real alternative to Mulroney on the trade issue." McLoughlin argued "John Turner's never going to get the public to love him. I think [in the debate] he got the public to respect him. He gave his supporters a reason to cheer for him, a reason to get out into the trenches and fight." *The National*, (Toronto: 26 October, 1988).

⁴⁷ Lee, p. 213.

⁴⁸ Duffy, p. 346. Political scientist Ronald Wagenberg of the University of Windsor also picked up on this point and told *Globe and Mail* reporter Murray Campbell: "What happened is that a lot of people said 'Hey, this guy is credible, this guy can do it,'" he said. Murray Campbell. "TV generation zapping the election process." *The Globe and Mail*, 7 November, 1988, p. A8.

messengers. In the age of a “boob-tube” election, the spoils go to whoever can best manage the symbiotic relationship of politicians and the media. As Lee wrote, “credibility, after all, is a matter of perception, and perception is the stuff of which campaign discourse is made.”⁴⁹

The Conservatives’ mission entailed using the national media, and primarily the television media, to raise strong doubts about the Liberal leader’s motive in his fight on behalf of the anti-free trade alliance. Had he taken up this cause because he truly believed free trade would adversely affect Canada’s sovereignty? Was this really “the cause of [his] life,” as he told Canadians in the debates? Or was there a more suspect or sinister reason for his crusade? Gregg reasoned that “if Turner’s motive could be shattered, his credibility would follow. So the Tories [would say] that Turner was lying to save his job.”⁵⁰ The message could not be easily dismissed. After all, surely the electorate remembered the internal coup plot launched by senior Liberal? Surely they recalled all of Turner’s bumbling? Even if they didn’t fully trust the Tories to promote such a hypothesis, all they needed to do was raise the spectre of doubt.⁵¹ Reporters and subliminal television footage could reinforce the idea once it was presented.

The counterattack was immediate and ruthless. Speaking to a large audience in the national capital, former Prime Minister Joe Clark, a member of Mulroney’s cabinet, delivered a blistering denunciation of the Liberal position and impugned Turner’s motives. If the speech itself wasn’t enough to convince viewers at home that Clark was saying something important, the enthusiastic reaction he received from the audience

⁴⁹ Lee, p. 214.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 215.

⁵¹ Lee notes that Mulroney’s instincts told him to go on the attack even before the strategists came back with the advice, p. 215; and “over the next few days, he would heave ‘managing change’ out the window and narrow his attack on Turner,” Ibid., p. 216.

would certainly underscore his message.

As Lee writes: "The Clark speech was delivered to the Confederation Club, a gathering of business leaders in Ottawa. At least, the people in attendance appeared to be business leaders – each table sported a corporate name tag, and the bunting and banners were those of the Confederation Club rather than the Progressive Conservative Party. Like everything else in the campaign, however, this gathering was not what it seemed. The Confederation Club is a Tory front, assembled every time a cabinet minister or Conservative leader wants a friendly crowd. It was pure theatre. And though the television reporter might mention that this was a partisan crowd, the pictures showed a non-partisan one; and the pictures always win. Television viewers see people who look just like their boss under patriotic-sounding banners, seated at tables with name-tags like 'VaxData Systems Inc.' They see Joe Clark appearing to tell a [seemingly] respectable, non-committed gathering that John Turner is a liar, and they see the audience cheering its rabid assent."⁵² Once again, the Conservatives set about to create an artificial perception, specifically designed for television, that would visually assist their message-making and message-transmitting goals. They attempted to reframe the message and ballot-box question for a second time in a seven-week campaign. That the dynamics of the campaign could change so dramatically once was not terribly unusual. In the free trade campaigns of 1891 and 1911, and in Diefenbaker's 1957 upset victory, the party which seemed likely to win at the outset found itself licking its wounds after the final votes were tallied. To regain the lead in a campaign after badly losing it in mid-course and sustain it until election day had never occurred before in Canadian federal politics,⁵³ however; and, one

⁵² Ibid., p. 218.

⁵³ This is an educated guess based on an analysis of past historical writing on campaigns. Without the

could argue, could only happen in the fast-paced electronic age where sophisticated agenda-setting techniques were successfully employed through a carefully executed mass communications strategy.

The Clark salvo was only one of many as the cameras rolled. Finance Minister Michael Wilson told reporters that “taking this lie [that free trade threatened social programs] into our senior citizens’ homes is the cruelest form of campaigning I’ve seen in 10 years in politics. When politicians feel that they have to prey upon the fears and emotions of some of the most defenseless people in our society, I say that is despicable.”⁵⁴ The following day John Crosbie, the Minister for International Trade, went to the University of Western Ontario to call Turner “a liar.” In a story on that evening’s *National*, Crosbie can be seen reading a quote from the Liberal leader that stated the free trade agreement will allow the Americans to have a say in Canadian social programs. “A lie!” he shouted.⁵⁵ One night on *The Journal*, Simon Reisman, a free trade negotiator who once considered John Turner a close personal friend also called him a liar and a traitor. Lee suggests viewers at home could not tell he was speaking figuratively.⁵⁶ In addition to this partisan campaign,⁵⁷ general supporters of free trade also made their presence felt.⁵⁸

benefit of frequent public opinion polls it can not be proven without a doubt. To the best of my knowledge, no Canadian political historian has argued any previous federal campaign had featured dramatic and sustained shifts in the way 1988’s contest did.

⁵⁴ Duffy, p. 351.

⁵⁵ *The National*, (Toronto: 2 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁵⁶ Lee, p. 219.

⁵⁷ Robert Mason Lee writes “the Conservatives replaced force with fantasy; the battlefield of image is best taken with the artillery of deception. By the late weeks of the campaign, the Tories had simply replaced genuine – and unpredictable – people with their own flying squad of wildly cheering sycophants. Wherever the prime minister landed, he was met by a fleet of signatored buses. The entourage consisted of three media buses, the leader’s bus, half a dozen police escorts, and the spontaneous-demonstration bus. At each event, the spontaneous-demonstration bus arrived first. About fifty Conservative youths dressed in matching white sweatshirts with the blue-and-red PC logo, clambered off and took their positions. The Mulroney itinerary was not released until the last practical moment, to preclude actual spontaneous demonstrations, which tended to be peopled by economic nationalists, trade unionists, left-wingers, and the

Reporters working on the campaign witnessed first-hand the extent to which the campaign had shifted; in a mid-campaign check-up on *The National*, David Halton told Peter Mansbridge that he certainly had not “heard the word ‘liar’ slung back as frequently from both sides during this campaign in any previous campaign.”⁵⁹ The campaign, showing the incredible volatility that the electronic age brings to politics, had thus entered yet another new phase. If the early weeks had seen a battle over which party’s theme would frame the ballot-box question and the debates had transformed it into an up or down vote on free trade, the pre-eminent issue was now one of credibility.⁶⁰ The Progressive Conservatives had, in short, reframed the election. Their intent was now to drive home their point.

Truth In Advertising: Lies, Lies, Lies

The Conservative plan to bomb the credibility bridge also relied heavily on paid-media messages. Having the largest advertising budget of any party and having used television spots only sparingly around the debate period, the party launched a frontal assault in the pages of daily newspapers and on the small screen.⁶¹ Tory campaign co-

idly curious.... If word leaked out and a crowd of protesters had gathered, the youths – ‘whiteshirts’ to the press corps – would position themselves strategically, to force the protesters out of camera range. When Mulroney spoke, it was up to the whiteshirts to cheer his every pause; if hecklers rose to protest, it was up to the whiteshirts to drown them out. One of the whiteshirts confided to a Global television cameraman that he ‘felt like a stormtrooper,’” Ibid., p. 173.

⁵⁸ For example, on November 3, Emmett Hall, a former justice of the Supreme Court who led a royal commission looking at whether Canada needed a public medical system, gave a press conference where he said Broadbent and Turner were lying when they said the deal will hurt medicare because “they want to win the election.” He said he listened to what was said so loudly and often about what the deal would do to medicare but, search as he did, “[he] could find nothing to support what is being said.” *The National*, (Toronto: 3 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁵⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 2 November, 1988).

⁶⁰ Lee, p. 220.

⁶¹ Advertising executive David Cravit told *The National* that “there probably can’t be too much advertising as long as the parties don’t change their basic message... “the more the merrier.” However, he noted money is going to do the most effective job because in the case of the last weeks before an election “tonnage matters.” *The National*, (Toronto: 14 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

chair Norman Atkins said the first order of business was to neutralize their opponents' most effective weapons. "They were making accusations about what effect free trade would have on the Canadian economy and we had to find a way to address these accusations," Atkins explains. "We came up with the '10 big lies.'"⁶² Lee calls the 'big lies' pamphlet "a classic of the propagandist's art."⁶³

The new television ads were even more powerful. Since the Liberal party's Border Ad had such a devastating effect in raising nationalist fears, the Conservatives decided to tackle it head-on. "We redrew the border line," Atkins chuckles.⁶⁴ In addition to responding to the Liberal advertisement, they cleverly fortified their own latest message. Using a stern announcer and soft, but threatening music, the Tory response began by showing a map of North America, identical to the Liberal's design and sans border. "John Turner says there's something in the free trade agreement that threatens Canada's sovereignty," the announcer intoned. "That's a lie. And this is where we draw the line," he continued as a hand with a black pen redrew the borderline. There was a quick cut to a shot of another hand turning the pages of the free trade agreement before the announcer's voice could be heard again. "There is not one word in this agreement that affects our independence, our social programs, healthcare, pensions or culture, all the values that make us unique," he said, before a still shot of Turner's red face in an unflattering pose was transmitted across the screen. "John Turner is misleading the Canadian people. That is the biggest threat of all," the voice concluded.⁶⁵ Other television

⁶² Senator Norman Atkins, interview by author, April 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

⁶³ Lee, p. 225.

⁶⁴ Atkins interview.

⁶⁵ "Here's where we draw the line: Response to Liberal Sovereignty Ad," Progressive Conservative Advertisement. Found during *CTV National News* (Toronto: 9 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: CTV Television Network/Réseau de Télévision CTV: CTV National News.

advertisements, once again using other sonorous voices to speak on behalf of the Conservatives,⁶⁶ presented a series of quotations from anti-Turner newspaper editorials while “grainy, out-of-focus black and white stills of Turner looking disheveled and like a deer caught in the headlights” were shown.⁶⁷ The *Calgary Herald*’s to-the-point accusation, “John Turner is lying,” punctuated the venom.⁶⁸

*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back:
The Liberals And NDP Tailor Their Ads To The “Old” New Agenda*

Conversely, the Liberal and New Democrat television advertisements running during the same period, roughly two weeks after the debates, continued to stress free trade, and not credibility. Perhaps cowed into removing their Border ad (although never admitting it), the Liberals instead put their leader in front of the spotlight.⁶⁹ In hindsight, showcasing Turner at the same time as other competing advertisements called him a liar may have been counterproductive. However, the Liberals were still under the impression that more support could be gained by continually reminding voters of their leader’s passion. Since they were unable to use actual footage of the famous clip from the debate – a court case where the party sued the network consortium for the rights to show the clip had been unsuccessful – the party’s advertising team tried to recreate the scene as much as possible.

In “John Turner: Free Trade & Our Identity,” the leader is pictured seated and talking directly to the camera. “The free trade deal would radically change the kind of

⁶⁶ According to Robert Mason Lee, the plan was for this “advertising blitz [to] maintain the ‘proxy’ format of their earlier television commercials. In these commercials, others spoke on the Conservatives’ behalf,” Lee, p. 225.

⁶⁷ Duffy, p. 352. Lee refers to the freeze frame photo as showing “the media-hot leader, the Mutant Ninja Liberal from Outer Space,” Lee. p. 226.

⁶⁸ Duffy, p. 352.

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that unlike the first generation of Liberal advertisements, Turner was now a positive for the party and as such could be seen in its ads.

Canada we believe in; change the way we look at ourselves, the way we think about ourselves, and the way we are,” the Liberal leader explained. “I’m not going to allow Brian Mulroney to sell out the birthright as a nation. I’m not going to let him reverse 120 years of history that made us unique and different. I’m not going to let Brian Mulroney destroy the Canadian dream.” As the first few bars of an instrumental version of O Canada played in the background and a graphic of Liberal symbol and slogan “This is more than an election; this is your future. Vote Liberal” appeared, Turner concluded “And that’s why this is more than an election; it’s your future. Vote Liberal.”⁷⁰

Ed Broadbent was the centre of a strikingly similar ad in rotation on television around the same time. Sitting and speaking to the camera, gesturing with his hands and reading off a teleprompter, the NDP leader tried valiantly to reassert his party’s campaign theme and agenda. “What’s this election’s all about?” he asked. “It’s about who’s on your side. Who’s fought for fair taxes, decent pensions and medicare. Who’s been against corporate polluters? Brian Mulroney represents the interests of Wall Street and John Turner is completely at home with corporate Bay Street. Only New Democrats have been there year in and year out for ordinary working families. So when you’re deciding who’ll work for you in the future, just ask yourself who has fought for you in the past.”⁷¹ Interestingly, the NDP logo was nowhere to be seen in this advertisement – Broadbent was the party’s brand.

The content of an advertisement was only part of its effectiveness, however.

While the Liberals and New Democrats continued to pay premium rates for the

⁷⁰ “John Turner: Free Trade and Our Identity” Liberal Party Advertisement. Found at the end of *The Journal*, (Toronto: 11 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁷¹ “Broadbent On Your Side.” New Democratic Advertisement. Found at the end of *The Journal*, (Toronto: 16 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

advertising space surrounding newscasts, the Conservatives tailored their advertising allotment with a different objective in mind. They opted to advertise heavily in the afternoons during soap operas and talk shows. “Traditionally, the best spot available for political advertising is news adjacency,” Gregg told Robert Mason Lee. “What you ideally want to do is book-end the *National* and the *Journal*. Now, if you did that today (in the closing two weeks of the campaign), you’d merely be talking to the decided. So we’re trying to get the elderly, the stay-at-homes. Big TV consumers. We’re trying to get – and I say this without a hint of condescension or of attempting to be patronizing, but there’s no other way to say it – we’re trying to get the real dumb ones.”⁷² In essence, Gregg’s savvy reading of the electronic media is a further indication that electoral spoils in the television age go to the party that thinks about the electronic advantage in advance.

The Conservatives were also attempting to replicate the successful advertising campaign the Republicans had used to thoroughly discredit Democrat Michael Dukakis. Negative advertising had been used to great effect in past presidential campaigns. For example, in the 1964 race the Democrats needed to show “The Daisy Ad” only once to play on fears that Republican nominee Barry Goldwater would use nuclear arms to destroy the world.⁷³ Even Canadian parties were not above using election advertising to make opposing parties look unattractive to voters. In the 1979 campaign, for example, the Conservatives ran an advertisement which matched a pronouncement by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau asking that Canadians to lower their expectations with footage of someone lowering the Canadian flag.⁷⁴

⁷² Lee, p. 228.

⁷³ *The Journal*, (Toronto: 10 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁷⁴ Duffy, p. 273.

The late campaign television spots designed for the 1988 campaigns in both countries tended to be much more personal, however. The Republicans released the infamous “Weekend Passes” advertisement featuring the story of Willie Horton, convicted of murder but released as a part of Massachusetts’ rehabilitative weekend furlough program under Democratic Governor Michael Dukakis’ watch. Horton had subsequently committed assault and rape after fleeing the state. The Republican ad more or less insinuated that Dukakis was responsible for these crimes.⁷⁵ North of the border, Canada’s Conservatives were not accusing John Turner of rape or assault; they were, however, directly questioning his motives, calling him a liar, and attempting to turn the ballot-box question into one which asked whether Turner could be trusted.

Author and Liberal strategist John Duffy stresses that the impact of the Conservatives’ post-debate advertising cannot be underestimated in framing the ballot question in the days before the polls opened. “Advanced practitioners of Canadian politics were saying this stuff works,” he says of the Horton advertisement and contemporary studies. “The doctrine of the effectiveness of negative advertising spread very quickly in Canadian politics,” he adds. People may not like negative advertising, Duffy suggests, but it actually delivers votes; and the Conservative anti-Turner commercials were a prime example. “The Conservative ads against Turner were devastating,” Duffy maintains, adding that in his opinion, “they were, along with the debates, the most important things that happened [during the campaign].” If the debates and the “Border Ad” turned the electoral tide in favour of the Liberals, the strategist says he believes “the anti-Turner ads turned it back to the Conservatives. They destroyed

⁷⁵ John Duffy calls Willie Horton the first great negative ad. John Duffy, interview by author, March 17, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

Turner and brought Mulroney back to the brink.”⁷⁶ Gregg’s targeting of specific voters who might be watching television programming in the afternoons was also an essential factor in their success in Duffy’s estimation.⁷⁷ “It saved the election for the Conservatives,” he concludes. “It’s as important as the debate, it’s as important as the border. It’s also a historical moment, because... these were the first really successful negative ads that drove a tonne of votes in the history of Canadian politics in a national election. They’re extremely important. Historically they were the first. Nobody had done negative well at the national level or effectively or pushed hard until this campaign, and it was earth-shaking.”⁷⁸ The Tories’ reframing efforts on the campaign trail, matched by their aggressive new advertising strategy, had essentially shifted public opinion dramatically for a second time with a matter of weeks.

Failure To Learn From Past Mistakes: Losing Control Of Media Coverage

If the negative commercials emanating from the Conservative camp were seismic, television coverage from the national news networks provided the aftershocks. After a brief post-debate honeymoon, when John Turner was portrayed as the election’s comeback kid, reporters began to put the Liberal under the microscope to which any front-runner would be subjected. Journalists, once again operating with a pack mentality, narrowed in yet again on the cost of the Liberals’ campaign promises. Much like the

⁷⁶ Duffy contends those ads, along with the Paul Martin resurgence in 2004, were the most successful comebacks in a campaign. Ibid. In Frizzell and others, Peter Masser, in his chapter “On The Hustings,” quotes Progressive Conservative Party Campaign Operations Director Harry Near as saying: “We had the agenda back. People were questioning John Turner and his motives; they were looking at him and Mulroney and their competence, and there was no contest. Once the Liberals lost the free trade issue, they had nothing else left,” Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 70.

⁷⁷ “[What makes a good advertisement?] Is it relevant, is it resonant, and does it successfully drive your strategy,” he asks rhetorically. “There are great ads that don’t work because they’re mistargeted. They go to the wrong voters,” Duffy interview.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

persistence they had demonstrated in getting to the bottom of the party's daycare policy, the news media tirelessly asked the Liberal leader to put a dollar amount on his party's promises and to explain where he would find the money.

On November 2, for example, Turner desired to keep free trade front and centre on his version of the country's electoral agenda, only to find reporters asking the types of questions he did not want to answer. CBC Reporter Wendy Mesley, in a story filed for *The National*, told viewers: "Later at a news conference, Turner was asked, as he is every day, how he will pay for his election promises." She included a clip of the Liberal leader attacking Brian Mulroney in 1984 for being reckless with his spending commitments.⁷⁹ Turner argued that, unlike Mulroney, he had spelled out exactly what they would cost; however, he would not answer how he would pay for the promises. "Have you ever heard of a government presenting a budget before it was elected?" he asked reporters. "I haven't."⁸⁰ As if to underline the Liberal leader's reluctance, in a clip from a press conference Mesley could be heard asking if Canadians would hear how Turner would pay for the promises before the election and why this was not reasonable request. The camera, trained on Turner, showed him looking away. "He never answered the question," Mesley's voiceover chimes in, disappointingly.⁸¹ She concluded by noting that questions about cost were getting in the way of "Turner's goal to keep free trade as the central issue of this campaign, an issue he thinks could win it for him."⁸²

Even on days when free trade was discussed, the Liberal leader was sometimes unable reiterate his patriotic vitriol. The following day, on November 3, he was left

⁷⁹ *The National*, (Toronto: 2 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

swatting back at respected former Supreme Court Justice Emmett Hall's statements that he was only saying free trade would hurt medicare to win the election and defending his own campaign strategist Michael Kirby's unfortunate comments comparing a blessing of the free trade agreement by big business to a blessing from the Ku Klux Klan.⁸³ Much like the brouhaha over the party's childcare policy, the questions abated only after Turner explained the costs of the platform in greater detail on November 14.⁸⁴

The Free Trade Election

Despite having only middling success in managing the issue, one which he had so strikingly forced through the electorate's consciousness during the English debate, Turner's pre-election hope that free trade would become the central issue of the campaign had been brought to pass, albeit by a very circuitous and perhaps unplanned route. CBC anchor Peter Mansbridge, who had previously received mail from viewers imploring his news team to discuss something other than free trade in the months between the announcement of a treaty and the decision by the Liberal-dominated Senate to block its passage through Parliament, was now "getting letters from people criticizing [the CBC] saying 'you never told us anything about free trade,' 'it's outrageous,' 'you reneged on your responsibilities.'"⁸⁵ As a result, the CBC and other networks began to rebroadcast all sorts of documentaries, analysis pieces and reports they had produced to give Canadians more information on a issue they still claimed not to fully comprehend.

⁸³ *The National*, (Toronto: 3 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The. Mulroney had heard Kirby's comments the same day they were made and raised them and attacked them several times throughout the day's campaign stops. As John Duffy notes, "The immediacy and drama at which television excels drew producers towards these call and answer stories and away from other aspects of the fight. The result was an even tighter TV focus on the leaders and their tours, one the newspapers followed," Duffy, p. 272.

⁸⁴ *The National*, (Toronto: 14 November, 1988). Available from Library and Archives Canada, Fonds/collection: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Television: National, The.

⁸⁵ Peter Mansbridge, interview by author, April 19, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

“Looking back, that probably really played into the Conservatives’ hands because it made it a one-issue campaign with one party for it and the other two parties against it,”

Mansbridge offers.

Anti-free trade activist Maude Barlow agrees. “It was one of those grass roots issues that just sort galvanized and forced its way onto the political agenda,” she argues. “The strategists could tell when they looked at the polls and saw this would be a winning issue for John Turner, and it would have been if they hadn’t split the vote with the NDP.” As the returns poured in on election night, Barlow’s fears were realized. Although the two parties opposing free trade received a combined 52 per cent of the national vote to the Conservatives’ 43 per cent, the regional variations and vote splits allowed the Conservatives to win a second consecutive, albeit reduced, majority government.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, when analyzing the final results, it is absolutely incumbent on historians to recognize the dramatic shifts in public opinion in the weeks leading up to the day voting took place. At 43 per cent, the Conservatives ended the campaign with approximately the same level of public approval as they had when the campaign began seven weeks earlier. In fact, if a researcher laid polls taken in the first week of the campaign and the final tally side by side, they could be tempted to assume nothing much happened to dissuade the electorate from their first impressions. Tracing the rise and fall of polling numbers throughout the campaign produces another picture entirely, however. Clear trends indicate the Liberal Party losing ground in the first phase of the campaign while the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats stayed level or gained support. A dramatic rise in support for the Grits at the half-way mark of the campaign

⁸⁶ The failure of the NDP to make a breakthrough in Quebec was particularly troubling for Broadbent and the primary reason for his subsequent resignation as the party’s leader. Broadbent interview.

and the corresponding dip in popularity for the Tories and NDPers indicate something quite dramatically influenced public opinion. Similarly, the subsequent restoration of Conservative fortunes and the renewed decline of the Liberals suggest public opinion shifted for a second time.

If this election was, in fact, a “free trade election” and a veritable referendum on one issue, logic would suggest the polls would remain relatively static. Free trade supporters would undoubtedly become aligned with the only major party to support the proposed free trade agreement, namely the Tories, while opponents would likely choose between the Liberals and the NDP. Even factoring in undecided voters would not have likely changed the popular support of the two sides very much. A 20-point swing in the fortunes of the party promoting the issue – made up of roughly a 10-point slide and 10-point gain in a matter of weeks – indicated there was another facet to this contest, however. The rhythm of the campaign had changed midway through and the mass media – both through manipulation by political parties and reporters – seemed to be beating the drum.

This dramatic shift in the public mood was first a result of the Liberals’ successful advertising strategy and Turner’s effective debate performance which framed the election as a question about what free trade would mean to Canada’s future. This was followed by the Tories’ successful reframing of the issue through their use of advertisements and public statements that focused attention on the issue of leader credibility, and not merely the concept of free trade. Moreover, the power of the electronic media to set or assist in setting the electorate’s agenda and frame the ballot-box question was clearly visible – if only through subsequent intense review – on the major networks’ evening news

programs. As a result, while the term “free trade” election has been the most common moniker for the 1988 campaign, John Meisel’s apropos observation that this was also a “boob-tube” election is also accurate and certainly borne out by source document analysis and reflection by participants.

Conclusion/Afterword: The Made-For-TV Election

As much as the passage of time can assist in attempts to put an event into perspective, it can also propagate somewhat errant characterizations. Students of Canadian political history have come to identify the 1988 federal election as the most recent example of a “free trade election.” The sheer dominance of the issue in media reports from the time, interpersonal communications (talk-on-the-street) and the subsequent impact of the Canada-U.S. – and later, North American – free trade agreement on the country’s economy conspire to reinforce this view.

Yet, to simply accept that this contest was destined to be an epic debate over the merits of free trade and the future of Canadian sovereignty would be a serious mistake. A more penetratingly comprehensive and accurate story of this campaign can only be told if we examine how specific actions by political parties and the news media ultimately shaped its outcome. Orthodox historical methods alone will not allow a historian to meet this objective, however. As this thesis has shown, when writing *new* political histories – set in the information age and largely conceptualized through a “boob-tube” – *new* historical methods and sensitivities are required. Historians studying this modern era can no longer count mainly on newspaper reports, correspondence, and text of speeches as the major source documents from which to reconstruct an event, as they did in the late 19th and early 20th century. Newer forms of communication – notably television – have undeniably become an important part of modern life, and their use and influence must be taken into account.

Fortunately for historians, our colleagues in the social sciences have analyzed these new media and developed theoretical concepts such as agenda-setting, framing, and

priming to understand their dynamism. It is to these new analytical tools we must turn when faced with the challenge of appraising or reappraising an event like the 1988 federal election campaign. If we learn how to use the tools, we also have the potential to discover why this event should be considered more than just another free trade election – especially if we confirm our findings with the people who followed the contest most closely.

CBC reporter Keith Boag, for instance, posits that “in 1988 you had the context for a very significant election. It did not have to be about free trade in my view. It could have been about other things, in my view. They [the politicians and the media] decided to *make* it about free trade [emphasis added].”¹ In earlier electoral contests, *making* a winnable issue for a campaign was almost beyond the realm of possibility for politicians or their strategists.² Well-regarded former Liberal strategist Keith Davey used to say that there was not a secret formula for winning an election. Rather, a campaign team had to *find* an issue that would win the election for them. By 1988, however, campaign strategists – buttressed by scholarly apparatus from the fields of political science, cognition and mass communications – believed that such an issue could indeed be created through the use of sophisticated polling, focus group testing and a successful media strategy to disseminate and iterate the political party’s stand on an issue. Broadly speaking, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s decision to enter negotiations for a potential free trade agreement created an issue that party strategists later made into an overarching campaign theme – change and the requisite political talent to manage it. Opposition

¹ Keith Boag, interview by author, March 13, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

² This was perhaps less true in the male-dominated, narrow democracy of the 19th and early 20th century. For instance, Macdonald, in 1878, crafted the election into a referendum on his national policy. But, in a modern pluralistic democracy this was much less possible.

groups, such as the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party, attempted to create their own themes that either welcomed issues such as free trade into the fold or attempted to downplay them in favour of other issues.

Once campaign themes were created, each party attempted to set the news media's electoral agenda in a manner that flattered their ambition. Television news reporters, and particularly network journalists, were a very high-priority group in these efforts because television was the type of mass communication medium which most Canadians used to inform themselves about current affairs and it offered politicians the closest approximation to daily, direct contact with prospective voters across the country. And, as Robert Mason Lee argued, by this time Canada had become a post-literate society,³ where voters gravitated towards personalities and away from long-standing partisan loyalties. According to Lee's analysis, electoral politics in a television age had become visual and visceral, not cognitive and contemplative. Traditionally, political strategists found the key to winning elections was through energizing and marshalling a party's faithful. However, as partisan loyalties decayed, persuasion of undecided and uncommitted voters became essential. Television, which scholars believe to be in part responsible for this disintegration of old political habits, also proved to be an excellent tool in persuading a fickle electorate.

Outright persuasion was only a small part of this equation, however, and yet it would probably be the only part identifiable to practitioners of the old political history. Without accepting the prevailing knowledge coming from mass communications scholars, these historians would likely not know that, while it may be difficult for the

³ Robert Mason Lee, *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*. (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1989), p. 17 and p. 138.

media to tell a modern and savvy consumer what to think, the media was quite adept at predisposing consumers *about* what to think. Essentially, these researchers found that if you could convince consumers that the menu of issues set before them was in fact a valid reflection of the real world, then they would choose from that menu to the exclusion of other possible choices. Prior to this intensive scholarly work, political strategists and members of the news media could only point to anecdotal evidence of these concepts and their effects; it was essentially accumulated wisdom and not proven fact.

The battle for control of the 1988 election's agenda is clearly evident upon subsequent viewing of and reflection on the recorded news broadcasts of the election period. And, armed with analytical tools and a substantial body of secondary literature, new political historians familiar with some mass communications concepts can appreciate exactly why this battle, played out in the news media, was such an important facet of the campaign. Initially, each political party tried to gain abundant coverage from the news media in a dogged attempt to put their campaign theme and their issues front and centre in the minds of voters. Political parties thus designed campaigns for their leaders that would reinforce their particular theme, with events and photo opportunities especially directed at the televised media. These events would *frame* the viewers' perception: a backdrop of a textile mill framed the issue in terms of trade and jobs, and of national self-sufficiency, for example. Successful tours would generate positive or neutral nightly news coverage with footage that would flatter the party and contain one or two sound bites or clips that referenced the party's desired message. Mistakes, however, could be easily amplified and seized upon by opponents and events or announcements that were not geared towards the medium's needs were either overlooked or forgotten. As much as

it is reasonable to think this campaign was about the battle between camps which supported or opposed the free trade agreement, therefore, it must also be seen as a battle between the elite in these camps to set a defined agenda and framed the subsequent debate.

Moreover, the news media, despite sometimes being swayed by political party strategy, were not passive information conduits that simply reproduced what was spoon-fed to them. Reporters, editors and producers had their own ideas for news and issues-based stories that often differed from the meticulously planned leaders' agendas that were designed to promote their goals. From the numerous prognostications about the potential impact of the free trade deal in the year leading up to the election, to the pre-planned feature stories that were fitted into the campaign, to the pack mentality that would occasionally take hold of reporters and dictate the story of the day, to the blockbuster reports such as the Liberal coup attempt, the news media independently wrote parts of the campaign narrative and proved to be another front in the strategists' agenda-setting war. Television thus became the battlefield – and the TV screen, the locus of agendas that were projected and accepted or rejected. The 1988 campaign provides an incontrovertible example of the development of a symbiotic relationship between politicians and journalists – one in which the political parties strove to set and impose an agenda and in which journalists both embraced and, at times, resisted these efforts. As respected CBC journalist Peter Mansbridge noted, prior to this election, television reporters were mostly wedded to the agenda of the strategists designing the tour set. Now, more self-assured and self-aware, these men and women began to take a much more critical look at the game being played or the war being waged.

Television-centric events, like the widely-viewed and crucial leadership debates, pervasive political advertising and third party campaigning and protests were a crucial dynamic of the 1988 election and must be taken into account when exploring the ways in which the election played itself out. Much like the famous Kennedy-Nixon televised debate in the 1960s, image and obedience to the demands of the medium made a considerable difference to the immediate and longer-term reaction and characterization of the event. Effective political visual advertising, which initially boosted the moribund Liberals by playing the national sovereignty card, later proved to be a significant element in the Grit downfall and the Conservative resurgence. Moreover, the renewed interest and focus on the free trade issue following the debates were promulgated by the third party interest groups like the Council of Canadians Against Free Trade and the Business Council on National Issues. They actively promoted or expressed opposition to the agreement, and through grassroots communication strategies and additional television coverage, served to nudge the agenda further toward a one-issue polarity.

As Robert Mason Lee wrote in 100 Monkeys, "The conditions were set in 1988, possibly for the first time in Canadian politics though certainly not for the last, for the management of a bunker campaign."⁴ This electoral war was won largely on orders from the political backrooms: orders that played out over the airwaves of the nation. Nevertheless, although the omnipresent issue of free trade drew many headlines and topped newscasts, the story of the 1988 federal election should *not* be told without considerable attention paid to the role of image and the televised media in shaping the debate. This campaign provides historians with the first irrefutable lesson that history, particularly political history, must in the future always ask the electronic question. When

⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

it comes to writing the history of future elections, a trip to the archives should always be accompanied by a trip to the viewing room.

Tellingly, Lee notes that “observing that image is important to the modern campaign is rather like commenting on the decline of trench-digging in modern warfare.” The author argues that “while it is true that trench digging is passé, a military historian would be missing the bigger picture if he were to notice only the loss of this skill, without noticing the technological developments that rendered obsolete the whole notion of fixed-front battlefields. [Likewise] concentrating solely on the importance of image in politics carries the risk of failing to notice the larger issue of how technologies have altered the strategy, conduct, and usefulness of campaigns generally.”⁵

This awareness must become one of the underpinnings of future scholarly works and research conducted by political historians, and it can only, this thesis contends, be reasonably achieved by borrowing some of the tools lying on the social scientist’s workbench. In the past, political historians have fallen into the trap of commenting on the mass media in election campaigns without delving into a deeper study of their dynamics. In some earlier political histories or biographies, the newspapers, posters or pamphlets were only filleted for pithy quotes or used to supplement the building of a chronology of an election. There was not much consideration of their inherent power over the dynamic of the campaign, however. In the future, if historians are mindful of advances in communication theory they might better appreciate a source’s ability to implicitly persuade an audience or serve as a mirror for active public opinion. Even during the formative years of the electronic age, radio and television generally continued to be considered as a new form of a record of what happened as opposed to an active agent. If

⁵ Ibid., P. 27.

any mention of the mass media's power to influence the public was made, once again it tended to concentrate on its successful practitioners or its aberrational qualities. For example, anecdotes abound of former Alberta Premier William "Bible Bill" Aberhart's masterful oratorical skills and influential radio broadcasts in the 1930s, and former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's easy adaptation to television in the 1950s, and media fawning over Trudeaumania in the 1960s. However, a *systematic* evaluation of the media's power by historians was lacking, and even if it were attempted, rhetoric and speculation would be the basis for most arguments. When, for instance, political historians sought to capture the essence of these events, their thoughts invariably turned to the archives and not the sound studio. Many of the rhythms of modern democracy were thus unobserved by political historians.

Social scientists were consequently left to pick up the gauntlet, conduct clinical experiments, produce a rich secondary literature and forge a number of theoretical tools. Their discipline and research interests tended to focus on current analysis, however; and when they used historical events to validate their theories, the historian's eye for context, method and style was often missing. Harking back to John English's 1986 admonition in the *Canadian Historical Review*, this creates an obvious opening for the new political historians and one we would be remiss not to seize.

This thesis has attempted to travel down one of the avenues suggested by English – to set a major Canadian election in the light of perspectives provided by the social sciences and communications theorists. I have endeavoured to recast, from the historian's perspective, the story of Canada's 1988 federal election. This analysis stands as one small part of an expanding body of literature that allows historians to apply the empirical

findings of social science studies to the traditional rhetorical beauty of the narrative and the political historian's refined method and appreciation of the broader context. A mass communications scholar or political scientist who surveys this thesis may in fact come away with very little in the way of newfound appreciation for agenda-setting and the related concepts of framing and priming. There is no doubt these specialists have a far greater understanding of the intricacies of their theoretical canon than a novice from a history department. Similarly, a seasoned historian may find some parts of the narrative wanting or quibble with source material. This thesis is not, however, intended to be a definitive history of the media in the 1988 federal election; rather, it is an early attempt at the type of hybrid history that shows signs of becoming the common denominator of future political history.⁶ The time has come for this exciting new form of historical writing to move in from the margins.

Afterword

As Ed Broadbent watched the election being called in favour of the Tories, he reflected on his own future. Although he had led his party to a record 43 seats in Parliament and matched the record 20 per cent of the popular vote the party had captured in 1980, he was distraught over the failure of the NDP to make a breakthrough in Quebec. As recently as ten days earlier, internal polling had the party winning about seven seats in the province. The Mulroney campaign shrewdly realized that most Quebecers were pro-free trade, however, and thus concentrated on those seats and won them back. "That was a major untold story of the campaign," the NDP leader maintains. "When I saw the

⁶ For example, several papers presented at the first Conference on Media History in Canada hosted by Ryerson University from May 31 to June 1, 2006 featured topics where mass media considerations were fused with historical political events, subjects or themes. *Conference on Media History in Canada*, (Toronto: Ryerson University, 2006), please see: <http://www.ryerson.ca/journal/conference.html>, Internet.

results coming in, I said to my wife, 'well that's it, I'm leaving.' That was the major failure of my political life – that failure to elect people in Quebec.”⁷

It was a failure that can be traced back to the difficulty his party had in setting the campaign's agenda and forcing the media and their opponents to frame the election according to the NDP's preferred script. The success the party had in reminding average, ordinary voters it spoke for them in the first few weeks of the campaign was dampened as the election's ballot-box question came to be one on free trade. The Liberals, and especially their leader, sought to have the electorate ask whether they wanted to become Americanized as they cast their vote. The Conservatives, after their initial “managing change theme” fizzled, wanted voters to ask themselves if they could believe John Turner and trust his motives when making a decision about free trade. The NDP had become the third party struggling to win votes on the same side of an issue as one of its opponents.

“The nationalist media, in general, in Canada, including the CBC and the *Toronto Star* had for a long time talked about the free trade issue,” Broadbent acknowledges. “We had talked about the free trade issue. It had been an issue before the campaign. We had wanted it to be one issue amongst many. I certainly didn't want it to turn into an up or down vote on free trade; particularly because Ontario had a Liberal government with a large number of MPPs already opposed. So the largest province, if it went up or down on free trade, we would be fighting not only the federal Liberals and Tories in Ontario, but the Liberal premier and all the Liberal MLAs. Since the Liberals were the bigger party and they had already taken hold of it, if you were a voter in downtown Toronto and free

⁷ The Hon. Edward Broadbent, interview by author, May 12, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

trade was your issue, and we didn't hold a seat but we were trying to win it and a Liberal held it, you'll vote Liberal. And that's what happened all over the country.”⁸

One man who did have a good night, at least monetarily, was Keith Boag. He'd won that \$50 bet that had filled him with guilt and regret for the entire campaign. However, his fears that the bet would subconsciously affect his objectivity were arguably unfounded. Liberal leader John Turner did receive a rough ride from the news media, yet Boag was only one of dozens of reporters covering his activities and his reports were comparable to those of his colleagues.⁹

Instead, the entire media's treatment of this election would come under substantial review, not only by academics and researchers, but also by the news media itself. There was a general sense that something, or many things, occurred in this campaign that desperately needed to be explored in the interest of advancing democracy. Unlike earlier Canadian election campaigns where local organization was essential for any party's electoral chances, Campaign '88 was fought in the bunkers, backrooms, airplanes and television studios for control of invisible signals. Once in an agent's control – whether a politician or the media – these signals offered a metaphorical key to unlocking a news consumer's mind and the ability to temporarily rewire it for their own purposes. With great power comes great responsibility; and, following the final vote tally, some members of the news media became determined to keep that power in check.

Since the 1988 election, the technological evolution of campaigns and the mass media has continued unabated. Indeed, the decade of the “information revolution” and “information super-highway” has been punctuated with clichéd observations about the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ A review of CTV, Global and Radio-Canada newscasts found very similar reporting styles in general.

rapidity of change. In retrospect, the “free trade” election, in addition to being a watershed moment in the history of the news media’s relationship with political campaigns, now increasingly also looks like a high-water mark for some elements of the Canadian media in their relation to political reporting.

The circumstances that made network television so integral to campaigning in 1988 have been altered to a certain extent. One factor has been the reluctance of some network news organizations to be drawn into the same symbiotic relationship some reporters observed during the campaign. “We looked seriously at our political coverage after 1988 and said, ‘you know, it’s time for a change,’” CBC anchor Peter Mansbridge recalls. “And that’s when we started pulling back from the plane coverage and dealing more with issues and on-the-ground reports of what was happening in various ridings and various regions of the country.”¹⁰ Simply put, they refused to be pulled into the parties’ agenda or passively accept issues framed for them. Mansbridge’s colleague Keith Boag notes that although the CBC initially took some flack from politicians and other news agencies over their stance, eventually other networks adopted a similar position and chose to use pooled footage from the tours and put their resources into alternatives types of election campaign stories.¹¹ “It foreshadows a lot of changes in the way politics are covered [today] in this country,” Mansbridge says. “I still don’t think we’ve found the perfect formula yet, but I think we’re doing a lot better than we did back then when we focused almost totally on what was happening on the planes and almost totally on what was happening with the leaders. It was still very much horse-race coverage.”¹²

Additionally, in the 2004 and 2005-2006 federal elections, the CBC experimented with a

¹⁰ Peter Mansbridge, interview by author, April 19, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹¹ Boag interview.

¹² Mansbridge interview.

policy whereby newscasts would not report on individual, day-to-day opinion polls during the campaign, further diminishing the pervasiveness of horse race coverage.¹³ The network has also employed “Reality Checks” in their campaign coverage to bring their audience beyond the spin and buzzwords.

The very importance of nightly network newscasts themselves has also declined markedly in the 500-channel universe. The flagship news broadcast is no longer the paramount vehicle for political news coverage; its primacy is under siege. “Those newscasts when they were on in ’88 would command 80 to 90 percent of the viewing audience. Now they’re lucky to get 60 per cent,” Don Newman reflects today. “The impact of television has switched to the all-news channels for now.”¹⁴ The 1988 federal election was the last national campaign to be conducted without at least one 24-hour news channel and the proliferation of specialty cable channels has given contemporary Canadian viewers much alternative programming to regular network newscasts.¹⁵ Today, the evening news appears at the end of a long day of almost instantaneous news from Newsworld, CTV Newsnet, CNN, the Fox News Channel, and others. Indeed, CBC now offers a website for ongoing news coverage. “It doesn’t dilute television in general, but it does dilute the impact of the nightly newscast,” Newman adds. “It’s reflected in their audience share.”¹⁶

As the nature of television changed, so have political strategies. For example, Newman contends that Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government now opts to do a live announcement at 8 a.m. so the networks can carry it live and rebroadcast throughout

¹³ Boag interview.

¹⁴ Don Newman, interview by author, April 6, 2006, Ottawa, ON, digital recording.

¹⁵ CBC Newsworld debuted in 1989, CTV Newsnet went on the air in 1997. Insert stats about increasing number of cable channels and market share.

¹⁶ Newman interview.

the day. Although political events in 1988 were planned with the aim of generating coverage on the nightly news, changes in technology and the make-up of the national media have prompted strategists to “try to dominate the news cycle that way.”¹⁷ Newman notes that a live event “allows the politicians to write the narrative” and bypass some of the news media’s gate-keeping capabilities. He maintains that the first live coverage of an event is mostly commentary of a narrative created by its authors. “They should have the free opportunity to make the announcement in front of whatever background they want. They get that time on television to do that. Then the media goes back to repackage it the way they did in 1988. But in 1988 all they had was the repackaged version,” Newman suggests. “The other difference is that now that it’s live on TV, the editors of both television and newspapers can sit in their offices and watch it at the same time the reporters are watching it. But they’re actually seeing it in a different way than the way it’s carried on television.”¹⁸ These developments would suggest that the emergence of a 500-channel universe has tended to play into politicians’ hands and their ability to set agendas and frame issues for the public. Yet, although the instantaneous nature of televised communication tends to concentrate power in the hands of the agenda-setting political elites, the Internet liberates and decentralizes knowledge and empowers the masses. Thus, political dialogue can still be manipulated, but there are ways to challenge this by diverting political dialogue into the porous and independently-controlled Internet. Hence, democracy continues to be served by checks and balances.

The Internet and other recent technological changes in the mass media have the potential of creating even more dramatic changes in campaign strategy. In 1988, the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. He notes that print reporters say TV has made their life so much more difficult because their editors can watch what’s going on and have their own view of the story.

Internet was still in its infancy and not widely used outside of government circles. With Internet use skyrocketing since that time and some studies noting that young people are spending more time online than in front of a television set, future historians may have to look increasingly at emerging mass communications research to determine if concepts like agenda-setting are becoming irrelevant or need substantial reworking to be of any use. The fracturing of audiences certainly reduces the impact of any single news source, and new types of communication diminish the importance of traditional media.

In the run-up to the 2004 American presidential election, for example, Howard Dean, contesting the Democratic primaries, stunned political commentators by successfully using the Internet as a grassroots tool for fundraising and building momentum. Also during the presidential campaign, a liberal Internet network called MoveOn.org managed to raise millions of dollars through online solicitation for candidates they backed and third-party advertising. At the same time, independent political commentary (often biting satirical) was provided by websites such as *The Onion*.

Web logs, or blogs, played an important role in the 2005-2006 Canadian federal election. Controversial comments by candidates or strategists were sometimes picked up by these sources before traditional news agencies could disseminate them. Podcasting on hand-held wireless devices brings television-like programs to news consumers virtually anywhere in the wired world at any time. Even electronic mail, or email, long used by senior government officials and politicians to communicate amongst themselves is now so pervasive among the public that the speed limit of the information highway is constantly being raised. Cell phones now permit text messaging – a form of email that

can be accessed immediately anywhere in phone service range. Individuals who are not constrained by party policies, agendas, or strategists, nor by the ethical restrictions placed on news media are now suddenly able through modern technology to comment on, criticize and share their personal opinions with just about anybody in the world. These new forms of interpersonal communication – which bypass elite opinion-makers and opinion-shapers – have the potential to invigorate our democracy at the grassroots level.

However, early indications suggest political campaigns and groups trying to promote a message are already using these technological wonders to their advantage, and possibly to agenda-set. Viral advertising has become an increasing phenomenon online, for example. Thus, rather than considering commercials and advertisements to be a nuisance, clever concepts, usually funny or amazing, are passed on as entertaining links or files to view from user to user. In Europe, where text messaging is more common, politicians and religious leaders send their respective faithful messages of inspiration or instructions on what they can do to help the cause. When the new interpersonal communication is manipulated by political campaigns, for example, it is then worth asking, does communications technology enslave or embolden our democracy?

The implications of all these advances in communication are simply staggering; yet they can also be troubling for historians. Just as extensive and organized collections of television broadcasts are at present largely absent from archival holdings, the intrinsically transitory nature of these new forms of communication pose even greater challenges. With one click of a “delete” button, email, electronic files and Internet web pages can disappear to history’s dustbins. One needs only to reflect on the fact that the major social and political responsibility scandals of the early 21st century, including

ENRON and Groupaction, have entailed the painstaking recovery of email communication and other ephemeral forms of communication. Unlike major media outlets that maintain their own tape libraries and archives for stock footage, the do-it-yourself mentality of the Internet leaves the choice of whether to keep certain files to the user. In the interests of future historical scholarship, action must be taken to preserve these sources for the next generation of researchers. If, as Edward Caudill notes in a chapter in McCombs, Shaw and Weaver's Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory, "agenda setting... provides a unique tool by which historians, like paleontologists reassembling fossilized bones, can reconstruct an extinct creature; in this case, historical public opinion," then it is necessary to preserve these "bones" for future study.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann foretold of a coming age when mass persuasion would be a powerful tool in manufacturing consent.¹⁹ "As a result of psychological research, coupled with modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner," he suggested. "A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power."²⁰ How prescient he was.

¹⁹ This was a phrase later picked up by Noam Chomsky to great effect in his writing.

²⁰ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), p. 248.

A Note About Sources

This thesis relied heavily on the video material housed by Library and Archives Canada, and specifically the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *The National* and *The Journal* broadcasts. Electronic records are, alas, fragile things and the historian is often left contending with gaps and poor quality. Unfortunately, problems accessing certain material, damaged holdings and missing tapes conspired to prevent a hermetic study. I have made every effort to produce a complete a study as possible, however.

In conducting my empirical research of material in these fonds, I attempted to view every broadcast of the aforementioned programs from October 1 to November 21, the entire span of the 1988 campaign. I also viewed a week's worth of these programs following the election to gain a sense of what the composite of these broadcasts would be like during a non-election period. *The National* was broadcast six days a week (from Sunday to Friday); however, the archives usually did not have the Sunday broadcasts recorded or catalogued in a fashion that was accessible. Moreover, some weekday editions of *The National* and *The Journal* (which aired following *The National* from Monday to Friday) were either not recorded, not accessible or damaged. Specifically, on several consultation copies the sound was missing from the broadcasts. In instances where the sound was not on the recording, I opted not to analyze or take measurements of story length or order because I felt it might not be an accurate reflection.

To compound these problems, the Archives' electronic catalogue was sometimes misleading and certain policies hindered my ability to make consultation copies. In conducting this research, I for the first time utilized electronic material at the archives. In the past, all archival material I accessed had been in the form of paper files with no

restrictions placed on viewing. When doing preliminary searches for video material, I saw that all the fonds I hoped to access were open with no restrictions. I did not realize that unlike paper holdings, electronic material could only be viewed if it was reproduced on a "consultation" copy. Only about one third to one-half of the CBC programs I required had these consultation copies. Moreover, some of the other network programs I used to contrast styles of news coverage did not have consultation copies. The Archives' special collections staff would transfer this material, but only at a rate of eight hours of footage per calendar month per patron. It would thus take anywhere from four to six weeks, and sometimes much longer for these copies to be made, and in order to gain access to as many of these programs as possible, other M.A. students at Carleton University graciously requested copies on my behalf. Other programs which had consultation copies listed on the Archives' catalogue were in fact not produced.

I strongly encourage any researcher undertaking this kind of project to carefully assess what is available and what must be ordered before proceeding. Moreover, I strongly suggest all material listed as being available is ordered well in advance of its use to ensure there is no damage or mislabeling.

In spite of these problems, I estimate I was able to view about 79 per cent of *The National* broadcasts in my time span and 71 per cent of *The Journal* broadcasts. Although not nearly as persuasive as if I had been able to view 100 per cent of each, I believe we can reasonably assume that my sampling is large enough to substantiate the patterns I found to emerge – especially as the missing programs were fairly evenly scattered throughout the eight weeks. Moreover, my sampling of other networks newscasts

included some programs which aired on days which were missed in my more exhaustive review of the CBC tapes.

As mentioned in my Afterword, the nature of electronic archives can make complete reviews of material in this fashion troublesome and daunting. Nonetheless, if this type of investigation and study of aspects of the post-literate electronic age is the way of the future, historians and archivists of the present must work on ways to improve the storage and accessibility of these types of material.

Appendix I – The National: Time of Coded Coverage

Note: When analyzing television news coverage of this election campaign I experienced some methodological difficulties. Each broadcast of *The National* included in my sample (See “A Note On Sources”) was qualitatively coded based on content and empirically measured based on story length and order in newscast. Timing each story segment was fairly straightforward. I measured from the start of the anchor’s introduction of a story until the reporter signed off. I rounded up to the nearest quarter minute, although most segments were impeccably timed to end at a quarter minute mark. Making judgments about separating stories into content codes was much more difficult. The codes I used were ‘leadership’ (segments which focused on the leaders’ tours, leadership qualities, or news stories related to one or more leader), “free trade” (stories which focused specifically on free trade or the benefits or consequences of the free trade agreement) and “other” (segments on individual candidates, other issues, opinion polls or any other item that did not fit neatly into the other two codes. This system worked well until the English Leaders’ debates. From that point until the day of the election some stories blurred between these categories. For several days the leaders responded to questions about free trade on their tours. In these cases I included the times in both columns in order to demonstrate the increased number of mentions of the issue and maintain leadership statistics. For this reason I have opted not to total the “free trade” or “other” columns, the codes with the most noticeable grey area. It should also be noted that approximately one to one and one half minutes of the 22-minute newscast was devoted to a show opening that featured brief “headlines” and a feature on what was “coming up” on *The Journal*. If I attempted this type of coding in the future I would likely set out stricter rules and definitions.

Date	Total Election (min)	Total Leadership (min)	Total Free Trade (min)	Total Other (min)	Total Program Length (min)
Oct. 3	9	7.5	0	1.5	22
Oct. 4	8	4	0	4	22
Oct. 5	11.5	7	0.25	4	22
Oct. 7	8.5	4.5	0.5	3.5	22
Oct. 8	7.25	4.5	0	2.75	22
Oct. 9	8.5	2.25	0	6.25	22
Oct. 10	9.75	2.5	3.5	3.75	22
Oct. 11	8.75	3	0	5.75	22
Oct. 12	10.75	6.25	0	4.5	22
Oct. 13	7.25	2.5	0	4.75	22

Oct. 17	9.25	4	0	5.25	22
Oct. 19	10.5	8	0	2.5	22
Oct. 20	11.25	9	0	2.25	22
Oct. 21	6.5	2.5	0	4	22
Oct. 24	7	6	0	1	22
Oct. 25	16.25	16.25	4	7.25	22
Oct. 26	8.5	8.5	2.5	0	22
Oct. 27	12.5	5	4.25	3.25	22
Nov. 2	13.25	6.75	4.75	1.75	22
Nov. 3	9	6.5	2.5	0	22
Nov. 8	10.25	6.25	3.5	4	22
Nov. 10	15.5	7.5	2.25	5.75	22
Nov. 14	11.75	6.25	0	5.5	22
Nov. 15	10.25	5.5	1	3.25	22
Nov. 16	9.75	6.25	0	3.5	22
Total	250.75	148.25	NA	NA	550
Per cent	45.59%	26.95%	NA	NA	100%

Appendix II – The National: Order of Coded Coverage

Date of <i>The National</i>	Leadership/Tour Story First (y/n)	Leadership/Tour Story Grouped (y/n)	Leadership Story/Tour Order In Broadcast	Election Story Order In Broadcast/Number of Stories or Segments
Oct. 3	n	y	2,3,4	1,2,3,4/11
Oct. 4	y	n	1,3,4	1,2,3,4/13
Oct. 5	n	y	4,5,6	4,5,6,7,8/9
Oct. 7	n	y	2,3,4	1,2,3,4,5/12
Oct. 8	y	y	1,2,3	1,2,3,11/13
Oct. 9	y	y	1,2	1,2,17,18,19/19
Oct. 10	y	y	1	1,2,10/10
Oct. 11	n	y	2,3	1,2,3,4/11
Oct. 12	y	n	1,2,6	1,2,3,6/10
Oct. 17	n	y	2,3,4	2,3,4,5,6,13/13
Oct. 19	y	y	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4,5/10
Oct. 20	y	n	1,4,5,6	1,2,3,4,5,6/13
Oct. 21	n	y	5,6,7	5,6,7,8,9/14
Oct. 24	y	y	1,2,3	1,2,3,4/11
Oct. 25	y	n	1,2,3,4,5,11	1,2,3,4,5,11/11
Oct. 26	y	y	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4/13
Oct. 27	y	n	1,2,5	1,2,3,4,5,6,7/13
Nov. 2	n	y	3,4,5	1,2,3,4,5,6/12
Nov. 3	n	y	2,3,4	1,2,3,4/11
Nov. 8	n	y	3,4,5	3,4,5,10/11
Nov. 10	n	y	2,3,4,5	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,12/12
Nov. 14	y	n	1,3,4	1,2,3,4,5,6/11
Nov. 15	n	y	7,8,9	6,7,8,9,10/12
Nov. 16	n	y	2,3,4	2,3,4,5,6/12
Total	13/25	18/25	NA	119/298
Per cent	52.00%	72.00%	NA	39.93%

Appendix III – The Journal: Content Description

Note: *The Journal* provided a more qualitative or “softer” sense of the media’s coverage in this campaign. Interestingly, one week before the English Leaders’ debate, *The Journal* ran a series of full-length programs on the free trade agreement. The National intensified free trade coverage only after the fireworks in the debate. Perhaps this is an example of what Maxwell McCombs argued in his article “Newspapers Versus Television: Mass Communication Effects Across Time.” “TV news is more like the front page,” he suggested. “Only when issues have achieved prominence are they likely to rate TV news time or front page space.”¹

Date	Election Segments (y/n)	Description
Oct. 3	y	“The Insiders” Documentary on Backroom strategists
Oct. 5	y	Environmental Issues debate with Environment Minister Tom McMillan (PC), Sheila Copps (Lib) and Phil Edmunston (NDP)
Oct. 7	n	Not election-related.
Oct. 10	n	Not election related.
Oct. 11	y	“Photo Opportunity” spoof song by John Gray
Oct. 12	n	Not election related.
Oct. 13	y	“A Tale Of Two Parties” – Liberals struggle and take on free trade, the NDP promotes Ed Broadbent and has high hopes in Quebec.
Oct. 17	y	“Free Trade Debate with Prominent Canadians,” – Pro-free trade agreement: Peter Lougheed, former premier of Alberta, and co-chair of Canadian Alliance for Trade and Job Opportunity and Tom D’Aquino president of the business council on national issues. Against Free Trade Agreement: Bob White, president of Canadian Auto Workers and Maude Barlow, Head of Council of Canadians.
Oct. 20	y	“Free Trade Debate with Party Representatives,” - John Crosbie (PC), Lloyd Axworthy, (Lib), Johanna den Hertog, (NDP)
Oct. 21	y	“The Gospel According to Free Trade,” – spoof by John Gray
Oct. 24	n	Not election related.
Oct. 25	y	Federal Leaders’ Debates: Highlights and Commentary with two panels – (1-Pundits) Vancouver talk radio host Rafe Mair, Calgary-based editorial writer Catherine Ford, Don McPherson of Montreal Gazette, and Halifax Chronicle-Herald columnist Tom Reagan; (2-Pollsters) Donna Dasko of Environics, and Rene Pelletier with Sorecom. John Gray spoof of the debates: “You’ll Make Me Blue.”
Oct. 26	y	Focus: Immigration. Debate with Immigration Minister Barbara MacDougall (PC), Sergio Marchi (Lib) and John Rodriguez

¹ Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, *The Emergence Of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function Of The Press*. (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1977), p. 98.

		(NDP)
Oct. 27	y	Taking to Strategists About Leaders' Debates. Panel: Hershell Ezrin (Lib), Robin Sears (NDP), Bill Fox (PC).
Nov. 2	y	Focus: Defence. Report with Roz Oberland. Debate Defence Minister Perrin Beatty (PC), Robert Kaplan (Lib), Retired Maj. Gen. Leonard Johnson (NDP).
Nov. 3	n	Not election related.
Nov. 8	y	Free trade debated everywhere: Report on mainstreeting with candidates. Free trade dominates talk.
Nov. 9	y	Focus: Economy. Debate with Finance Minister Michael Wilson (PC), Brian Tobin (Lib), Mike Cassidy (NDP).
Nov. 10	y	Segment on the prospect of a minority government. "Selling Political Soap": Documentary on the image-makers and image-breakers. Segment on the fringe parties
Nov. 11	y	Segment (1) called "Hedging our bets": Can we really get out of the free trade deal with six months notice? Segment (2) explores one family's choice in the election.
Nov. 15	y	"The View From the Other Side." Two Americans, one in favour and one against the free trade deal talk about the issue.
Nov. 16	y	"Free trade, from John A. to Today": Two prominent historians debate free trade, then and now. Guests: Kenneth McNaught (against free trade), Michael Bliss, (pro-free trade).

Appendix IV – Published Polls

Source: Alan Frizzell and others, *The Canadian General Election of 1988*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), p. 92.

Publication Date	Pollster	Sample Size	PC	Lib	NDP	Other	Undecided (Factored into other totals)	Leader	Third Place
Oct. 3	Gallup	1,061	43	33	22	2	22	PC	NDP
Oct. 5	Reid	1,512	45	26	27	2	25	PC	Lib
Oct. 10	Gallup	1,017	41	32	26	1	13	PC	NDP
Oct. 11	Environics	1,515	42	25	29	4	10	PC	Lib
Oct. 14	CTV	1,100	46	27	26	1	18	PC	NDP
Oct. 16	CBC	2,467	42	25	29	4	10	PC	Lib
Oct. 17	Gallup	1,027	39	29	28	4	10	PC	NDP
Oct. 21	CTV	1,100	43	25	30	2	10	PC	Lib
Oct. 24	Gallup	1,034	40	28	29	3	19	PC	Lib
Oct. 29	Reid	1,502	35	35	28	2	23	PC/Lib	NDP
Oct. 29	CTV	1,100	35	39	23	3	19	Lib	NDP
Oct. 31	Gallup	1,034	38	32	27	3	11	PC	NDP
Nov. 1	Environics	1,538	31	37	26	6	13	Lib	NDP
Nov. 2	Goldfarb	1,000	34	40	24	2	28	Lib	NDP
Nov. 4	CTV	1,101	40	37	20	3	16	PC	NDP
Nov. 7	Gallup	1,041	31	43	22	4	10	Lib	NDP
Nov. 9	Environics	1,275	35	37	24	4	9	PC	NDP
Nov. 10	Reid	1,501	39	35	24	2	22	PC	NDP
Nov. 10	CBC	2,200	38	38	21	3	8	PC/Lib	NDP
Nov. 11	CTV	1,100	39	39	20	2	15	PC/Lib	NDP
Nov. 14	Gallup	1,026	35	35	26	4	8	PC/Lib	NDP
Nov. 19	Reid	1,512	41	33	23	3	11	PC	NDP
Nov. 19	Gallup	4,067	40	35	22	3	12	PC	NDP
Nov. 19	CTV	2,720	43	32	20	5	15	PC	NDP
Nov. 21	Election	-	43	32	20	5	-	PC	NDP

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