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AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1984

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

CHARLES K. ROTTERO

For another four years, the television debates are over and we are in for "FOUR MORE YEARS", of Ronald Reagan. Despite the landslide victory of Ronald Reagan, the television debates proved to be the most interesting part of the campaign from the rhetorical standpoint.

The first debate moved to Louisville Kentucky, where for 100 minutes the two candidates went podium to podium over everything from social security to abortion. In this paper, this writer will attempt to look critically at the development of the rhetorical style of both candidates from their respective viewpoints.

THE GREAT DEBATE: PART I.

In the first debate in Louisville Kentucky, the opponent, Walter Mondale appeared to be calmer and more presidential than he ever has on television and he did put Reagan on the defensive frequently. "On the whole, the exchanges were more substantive than heated, more insightful than dramatic. In all, there were few epic lines. Mondale chose the high-risk strategy of making his proposal to raise taxes to staunch the deficit the centerpiece of the performance."¹

Reagan - either by choice or by circumstance took surprisingly few opportunities to invoke the patriotic symbolism and imagery that has been his hallmark. Instead, he often rattled off economic statistics like a CPA. In the closing statements, Reagan chose to mainly rework his famous question: Is America better off than it was four years ago? Mondale kept his rhetoric focused on the future saying in conclusion, "The real question is, will we be better off? Are we building a future that this nation needs."²

In the first debate, Mondale seemed to be the clear winner. A special NEWSWEEK POLL taken immediately after the broadcast of the first debate showed that 54 percent of the viewers said that Mondale did a better job, appearing more confident, thoughtful and well-informed. With Election Day looming on the horizon, "equal numbers of voters said that because of the debate, that they would likely vote for Reagan (48 percent) as for the Democratic challenger (46 percent). Among the swing voters, however 63 percent said that they were more likely to vote for Mondale as a result of the debate."³

After the debate, White House Chief of Staff James Baker said: "The President far and away got the best of it."⁴ Yet, some of the president's other handlers said that the president overdid the statistics, and appeared sometimes "too defensive."⁵ On the other side, the Mondale aides were more than just a little happy with the performance of their man "Fighting Fritz." Many of the Mondale aides were quoted in newspapers and magazines as saying that the president's performance was lackluster. Senior Mondale Adviser John Reilly said: "If this guy is the GREAT COMMUNICATOR, I think he slipped a gear."⁶

The strategy of the Mondale camp was to keep Reagan off balance for much of the debate, a ploy which worked in the first debate, but faltered in the second debate.

The debate, to some degree was precisely what Mondale had wanted all along: a detailed dialogue on the issues. As we all remember, the most heated portion of the debates was in the area of abortion, truly the one most sensitive issue of the 1984 campaign. The president has contended that there is no scientific data to prove that an unborn child is not a person and therefore entitled to constitutional protection under the law. On the other hand Mondale has asked rhetorically should "the government be reaching into our livingroom?"⁷

Here we can see how Mondale has used a question and one of Reagan's own themes as a weapon against Reagan in order to keep him off balance as noted earlier in this paper.

Perhaps the most serious factual error of the debate was made by Reagan in contending that there was no need to cut social security benefits "because social security has nothing to do with the deficit."⁸ The President argued that social security taxes go into a separate fund, but the fact is that since the Johnson administration, social security taxes and benefits have been counted in the overall budget totals and are a central part of the budget arithmetic.

As we can see, up to this point in the Presidential race, Mondale had Reagan on the defensive most of the time, and the two biggest issues of the campaign were the issues of abortion and social security. This is not to say that other issues were

not discussed; they were. In both of the debates, the issues of arms control, advanced weapons systems, unilateral talks with the Russians on arms reductions, and the U.S. policy in Central America, were among the top priority of the Presidential debates of 1984.

WHERE DO THEY STAND

Consistently throughout the debates and press interviews, the candidates were asked where they stood on the issues of the campaign and what they would do if elected. Here is a synopsis of some of the points of the campaign, taken from U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT.⁹

Reagan on Defense Spending: Push for consistent increase in defense outlays, including a 7.8 percent increase for the coming year, and modernizing major new weapons systems while improving the conventional forces."

Mondale on Defense Spending: Mondale has suggested that spending should be boosted but at a rate roughly half of what Reagan has proposed in his package. Shift the focus from costly equipment such as nuclear-powered aircraft carriers in favor of building up the readiness of conventional forces and crackdown on Pentagon waste and fraud.

Reagan on Weapons Systems: The President has said all along that he is in favor of new space-based anti-missile defense systems and the deployment of sea-launched nuclear cruise missiles and continued development of the MX missile and the B-1 bomber, as well as the Trident 2 submarine-launched missiles.

Mondale on Weapons Systems: Mondale has suggested that the U.S. hold up on the testing of anti-satellite systems and concentrate on deploying sea-launched nuclear cruise missiles pending negotiations with the Soviet Union. Mondale has further suggested that the MX missile be scrapped as well as the B-1 bomber while proceeding with the single warhead missile, Trident 2 submarine missiles and the Stealth bomber technology.

These are just a few of the points where the president and his opponent, Mr. Mondale differed with some regularity during this campaign and during the televised debates. As the debates moved on to Kansas City, the issues of the campaign moved along with the candidates, and it seemed that the same set of issues set the tone of the second debate.

One point that does stand out in this round of the debates was the statement that was made that it would be easy to call back missiles once they were fired. Staunchly the President denied that he said such a thing and the furor began in both camps. In the Kansas City debate, Mondale said "How could any man think that a nuclear missile, once fired could be called back. That's the most ridiculous thing that I've ever heard.

In response to that, the president said that what he meant was that sea-launched nuclear missiles could not be called back, but to avert a war, the submarines carrying the missiles could be called back before the missiles were launched.

Hours before the second televised debate, Reagan had charged Mondale with a faulty foreign policy record saying that "He is exposing us to dangerous, unnecessary risks." Meanwhile in the

Mondale camp, the Democratic challenger had accused the Reagan administration of illegal war actions in Nicaragua.

During the course of the debate, Mondale said, "A president has to know what is going on in order to make the right decision." Mondale alluded to the claim of a Nicaraguan rebel leader that it is the practice of his CIA-backed group to execute government officials who are deemed "criminals." A Pentagon intelligence report informed top Reagan administration officials of such assassinations more than two years ago. Secondly, Mondale brought out the controversial 90-page CIA manual written for rebels fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. In his concluding remark, Mondale said, "I don't know which is worse, a president who doesn't know what his government is doing or a president knowing of this illegal action and approving it."¹⁰

During the second debate, the candidates mainly re-emphasized points in defense spending and domestic issues with no other points really coming to the forefront of this debate. And with this the debates ended, with Reagan holding a large lead over Mondale.

CONCLUSIONS

If prizes were awarded for "best verdict," I would have to say that it would go to the panel of debate judges selected by the Associated Press. The experts used a scorecard modeled after those used in student competition and came up with a quantified result: 174 points for Mondale and 157 points for Reagan, with six of the seven judges picking Mondale as the winner.

Mondale "was not whiny, he was not small, he was not picky," said the panel's chairman Dr. James J. Unger. "He met the GREAT COMMUNICATOR and he demonstrated that he was as much in command of the facts as Mr. Reagan was."¹¹

On a more downbeat note, some of the judges felt that Mondale was too bland and professorial while others thought that both men were off their feed.

Before the debate, Mondale's handlers had devised a plan to throw Reagan off-balance by totally upsetting expectations.

Kathleen Jamieson of the University of Maryland, who analyzed the forensics of the 1980 debates for the networks, theorizes that there are only four moments during the campaign when the voters might "open up" to the Mondale message. One was after the successful convention, and Mondale squandered it. The others came after the debates, including the October 11 vice-presidential face-off. "If Mondale wins, he's got to reinforce the message fast. If he doesn't win, it doesn't matter much what he does."¹²

This writer might add here that as one watched the debates, they were almost like invisible ink: it takes a few days for the message to fully develop and then a few more days to fully absorb the content of both messages in order to make a commitment to one candidate for whom we feel will give his all for four years.

NOTES

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- ¹NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984 THE GREAT DEBATE
- ²NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ³NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁴NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁵NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁶NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁷NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁸NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ⁹U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, September 24, 1984, WHERE THE CANDIDATES STAND.
- ¹⁰THE TENNESSEAN, Sunday October 21, 1984.
- ¹¹NEWSWEEK, October 15, 1984.
- ¹²NEWSWEEK, October 8, 1984.

THE RHETORIC OF RONALD REAGAN

JOSEPH B. FIUMARA

Ronald Reagan ran for President of the United States in the 1980 Presidential election, winning by a landslide victory. His rhetoric in politics, however, can be tied together to show his political views on issues from his 1980 and his 1984 Presidential campaign victories.

First of all, President Reagan's views on big government are very anti-strength and anti-centralized in structure. Reagan is a Conservative in his political views as evident from the following quote by Thomas Paine, a long-time refuge of the Liberals. This quote comes from the autobiography of Ronald Reagan with Richard G. Hubler called, Where's the Rest of Me?:

Government is a necessary evil; let us (nation) have as little of it as possible. (Reagan adds here his own thoughts in the following quote): We (Reagan's administration) are here to see that Government continues to serve the people and not the other way around. Yes, Government should do all that is necessary, but only that which is necessary.¹

In his acceptance speech for the re-election of the President of the United States at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas on August 23 of this year, Reagan made clear his dislike of too much government intervention into the lives of the citizens of this country.

Reagan emphasizes, in his political rhetoric, the need to cut costs of government. Taxes, he believes, are growing and growing at the peoples' expense. President Reagan's "New Beginning" calls for tax cuts that will be more fairer to all Americans and that will be easier to understand.

President Reagan's rhetorical political style is geared, I feel, for the individual person and not for the mass of individuals that make up the country called America. For example, in his acceptance speech given at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, President Reagan mentioned that he had asked the people of America in 1980: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"² He was, in my opinion, using the "you" approach in political rhetoric. This is where one uses the word "you" to try to speak at a one-on-one basis with people, or at least to try to make it appear that way. He uses the words "you" and "we" a lot in his political speeches. He does this so that, once again, he can appear to appeal to the individuality of the American people. Now, the words "you" and the word "we" are different in their uses, or they can be different. However, when this writer talks about Reagan using the words "you" and "we" it is to emphasize the use of these words as opposed to using words like "country" and "my". The words "we" and "you" are so much more personal in context than other political usages of words to refer to the voting people of America. An example to further prove the point is a quote taken from the previously mentioned acceptance speech: "We (nation-people) came together in a

national crusade to make America great again and to make
"America great again." "and to make" 'a new beginning.'"³

Another aspect of Ronald Reagan's political rhetoric is his great use of tying together visual images and verbal language. For example, President Reagan, in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, was speaking of the journey of the Olympic torch across various lands of America. His account of the journey not only left a running account of where the torch traveled, but it also gave people images from his quite prolific descriptions of the people who encountered the torch.

The passage, only pointing out a part of it, goes like this:

All through the spring and summer, we (American people in general) marvelled at the journey of the Olympic torch as it made its passage, east to west. Over 9,000 miles, by some 4,000 runners, that flame crossed a portrait of our nation. From our Gotham City, New York, to the cradle of liberty, Boston, across the lovely Appalachian springtime, to the city of the big shoulders, Chicago... And then, in San Francisco, a Vietnamese immigrant, his little son held on his shoulders, dogged photographers and police motorcycles to cheer a 19-year-old black man pushing an 88-year-old white woman in a wheelchair as she carried the torch.⁴

President Reagan is quoted as saying, from the same text as used above from the Republican National Convention in Dallas: "We (Reagan administration) proclaimed a dream of an America that would be 'a shining city on a hill'"⁵

All through his political rhetoric, President Reagan constantly uses prolific words and phrases as key ingredients to his persuasive language. The above passage examples prove this to be true.

President Reagan not only uses the issues of tax cuts and the simplification of government and government spending in his political rhetoric, but he also uses the extremely controversial issues of abortion, ERA, and prayer in school. These two issues of prayer in school (i.e., related to religion which is always a touchy issue in a Presidential election) and abortion are two very sensitive issues to take either a positive or a negative stand on in a Presidential election.

Reagan, according to the book, The American Elections of 1980, edited by Austin Ranney, was anti-abortion and anti-ERA in the 1980 Presidential election. Reagan's rhetoric then and his rhetoric in the 1984 Presidential election on these two issues was the same: Reagan is against both abortion and ERA. The abortion issue, though, was a big issue with womens' groups in both the 1980 and the 1984 Presidential elections. According to Mr. Ranney, the 1980 Presidential election focused heavily on the issues of abortion and ERA. He went on to say in his book that feminist groups and pro-abortionists fought Reagan's group for clearer stands on how he felt about legally expressing his views on these issues.⁶

Mr. Reagan's rhetoric in both 1980 and in 1984 on the issues of abortion and ERA are more clearly pinned down in this passage from Mr. Ranney's book:

ERA and abortion remained the biggest burrs under Reagan's saddle. Satisfying conservative activists on these issues had always been fairly easy: he (Reagan) opposed ERA and abortion.⁷

In Blue Smoke and Mirrors (How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980), authors Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover

elaborated on the differences of then President Jimmy Carter and his Republican opponent Ronald Reagan. One point mentioned in the book was the image of Reagan in 1980 as one who would push our country into a war. Germond's and Witcover's book indicated President Carter made several statements describing Reagan as war-like. In retaliation to these statements to the press, Reagan made this statement to the press:

Every time you (Jimmy Carter in 1980) talk about national security and restoring the margin of safety that...for thirty years this country has had, there are those who say that's war-like, that this is the fellow (Reagan) who wants to take us into war. I think to accuse that anyone would deliberately want a war is beneath decency.⁸

However, Reagan does push for America's strong defense policies abroad. From the text of Reagan's acceptance speech from the Republican National Convention mentioned earlier in the paper from Dallas, Texas, Reagan explains how important a strong military defense is to our country, since other countries, like Russia, are presenting dangers to us. This passage from his acceptance speech text mentioned earlier best shows how hard-hitting and to-the-point Reagan's beliefs in a strong military defense can be to him. I also think that the following passage best expresses how President Reagan tries and succeeds in going right for the conscious and the pride of the American people:

Our policy (defense policy of the Reagan administration) is simple: We are not going to betray our friends, reward the enemies of freedom, or permit fear and retreat to become American policies, especially in this hemisphere. None of the four wars in my lifetime came about because we(nation) were too strong. It is weakness that invites adventurous adversaries to make mistaken judgments.⁹

Reagan plays on the emotions of the American people to a large degree in his political rhetoric to get the persuasive edge in his speeches. This passage, also from the text from the Republican National Convention mentioned above, further shows this:

Today our troops have newer and better equipment, and their morale is higher. The better armed they are, the less likely it is they will have to use that equipment. But if, heaven forbid, they are ever called upon to defend this nation, nothing would be more immoral than asking them to do so with weapons inferior to those of any possible opponent.¹⁰

On the subject of education, Reagan has made cuts on the amounts of federal subsidized grants for college students, claiming that it was done to keep the students who can afford to attend a public college from getting the federal funds from possible students who really need the money to attend college. On the other hand, Reagan has pushed for tuition tax credit for the parents of students attending private schools, approaching this issue on the emotional appeal rhetorical style that he employs in his speeches. The following passage from Reagan's acceptance speech text shows this:

Millions of average parents pay their full share of taxes to support public schools, while choosing to send their children to parochial or other independent schools. Doesn't fairness dictate that they should have some help in carrying this double burden?¹¹

Before concluding this paper, this writer would not be too fair to the readers if the "I love America, how about you?" rhetorical speech style of Reagan's political persuasion were not mentioned. This rhetorical style is used by him to not only

make the American citizen feel better about himself/herself, but also about their country and what he and his administration have done to put us (nation and the people) back in a respectable position, both at home and abroad.

President Reagan's acting past has aided him in using his rhetoric. This good camera appearance that he projects to the people of America (no doubt due to his acting background?) on television helps him to get the attention of the people. He has had experience in trying to convince people of his various characters and characteristics with his acting past, so why not use this type of rhetorical style in a political situation? He has incorporated both acting skills rhetoric and his own political rhetoric in winning voters and other forms of support for his ideas.

With statements like the one that follows from the acceptance speech text of Ronald Reagan, one can see why he is able to capture the attention of the American people and to gain their support:

Today, of all the major industrial nations of the world, America has the strongest economic growth; one of the lowest inflation rates: the fastest rate of job creation, ... We're enjoying the highest level of business investment in history and America has renewed its leadership in developing the vast new opportunities in science and high technology.¹²

Joseph B. Fiumara is a Mass Communications major at Middle Tennessee State University.

¹Ronald Reagan with Richard G. Hubler, *Where's the Rest of Me?* (New York: Karz Publishers, 1981), p. 297.

²New York Times, August 24, 1984.

³New York Times, August 24, 1984.

⁴New York Times, August 24, 1984.

⁵New York Times, August 24, 1984.

⁶Austin Ranney, ed., *The American Elections of 1980* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1982), pp. 103-121.

⁷Ranney, pp. 114-115.

⁸Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors (How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980)* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), p. 247.

⁹New York Times, August 24, 1984.

¹⁰New York Times, August 24, 1984.

¹¹New York Times, August 24, 1984.

¹²New York Times, August 24, 1984.

WAKE ME WHEN IT'S OVER...

or

THE RHETORIC OF WALTER MONDALE
IN SEEKING THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION

David Walker

The day after the Maine caucuses in which Gary Hart had unexpectedly won his second big victory, Walter Mondale spoke before a packed audience at Boston's Faneuil Hall. In a choked voice he said: "The message-sending is over. The posturing is over. Now we're coming down to picking a real, live person."¹ After watching the acceptance speech of Mondale before the Democratic convention, this writer is not sure one was picked. Dwayne Powell of the Raleigh News and Observer captured, perhaps best, the spirit of the 1984 Democratic party when, in a political cartoon, he drew the illustration of two people looking enthusiastically in one direction, exclaiming: "Look, there's Cuomo!!" A lady was fervently explaining to another delegate: "I saw Ferraro in person last night!!" Still another wild-eyed delegate was shouting: "Wow, It's Teddy!!!" Finally, one bored delegate was half-heartedly mentioning to another delegate; "I see Mondale just walked in."²

Nevertheless, the votes were cast, Mondale was chosen as the standard-bearer, thereby justifying the need for reluctant rhetoricians to sadly put their Cuomo, Jackson, and Kennedy tapes aside, and concentrate on the former Vice-President from Minnesota. As observations are made about his rhetoric, this paper will not be so

naive as to think that his speaking abilities, rather than party rules, his organization, his qualifying more people on time, and his greater name recognition, got him the nomination. Nevertheless, for what they may have added, or subtracted to his effort, certain elements of his rhetoric will be noticed. This paper will be limited to his efforts from the first of January, 1984, through his acceptance speech.

THE ISSUES

To understate the case, the issues were really Ronald Reagan and Gary Hart. To be sure, there were certain substantive ideas and contentions, but most of Mondale's approach was centered around an effort to discredit the ethos of these two men. The various candidates for the nomination participated in at least twelve debates, seven of which were recorded verbatim in the New York Times. In the first several debates, Mondale was, as the "front-runner" on the defense from his Democratic rivals and, for the most part, instead of attacking them, indicted Reagan. In the debate at Dartmouth on January 15, he contended that "only justification for seeking the Presidency is to provide a contrast of Mr. Reagan, who is not dealing with the future at all."³ After the Hart upsets in New Hampshire and Main, Mondale turned full blast upon Gary Hart as well as continuing his criticisms of Reagan.

If one had asked Mondale for a delineation of his major ideas as he sought to provide a Democratic alternative to Reagan, he would have answered, as he did in the Pittsburgh debate on April 5:

I see three central essential objectives in dealing with our nation's future. The first is to lead the world toward a safer world. This means policies that will get those God-awful nuclear weapons under control. I favor a freeze, I favor a broad range of initiatives that will move us toward arms control. It means electing a President who knows both the dangers and the complexities of the world -- who understands that American foreign policy must be undergirded by our values and by understanding and respect so that we have the leadership necessary in the world. Secondly, I think it is clear that America must have sound, effective, tough new economic policies that restore the competitive edge of our economy so that the jobs, the future and the prosperity are here and not elsewhere.

And finally, we must have a President who insists on restoring the fundamental fairness that's so basic to American values. That means the enforcement of laws against discrimination, the protection of our senior citizens, a fairness across the whole range of American life and a President who understands that he's been elected by the people to serve the people.⁴

Sounds like standard Democratic fare that any Democrat could run under? Mondale chose to describe himself as comparatively advantageous to Hart in at least three ways. In talking about foreign policy, he contended that he advocated the nuclear freeze long before Hart, and that Hart was inconsistent on foreign policy. In talking about the economy, he claimed that Hart's ideas lacked substance. In praising the virtues of fairness, he complained, probably unjustly, that Hart was weak on civil rights.

Another issue upon which Mondale chose to speak, when attacking Reagan, was the current administration's record in education. In Texas, he said:

Can you think of a single book that Mr. Reagan has ever talked about? Can you recall a single time he showed his respect for science or scholarship? This may be the most anti-intellectual Administration in modern history."

In issuing his "report card" on Reagan's education program, he charged: "He doesn't understand history, he doesn't do his homework, his arithmetic is a disaster. On his budget he can't tell the difference between addition and subtraction. He gets an A in dramatics but that's not enough for a pass. I'm sorry to say that, after nearly a full term, Mr. Reagan has flunked the course."⁵

What were the other strategies by which Mondale sought to support his case? Three seem to stand out.

WOULD YOU BUY A USED CAR FROM THIS MAN?

The first of these was his frequent use of statements playing up his experience in leadership, especially as a result of his being Vice-President. In the Dartmouth debate, he reminded his audience: "I sat through and participated in the Camp David accords....It was one of the great victories of the human spirit, and I was pleased to be a part of it."⁶ In the debate of March 4 in Boston, in citing his experience, he declared: "I have a lifetime of dealing with the Soviets."⁷ In the Chicago debate of March 18, he asked:

Who can get arms control, who can bring about a reduction in international tensions, who has the experience and the background to make a difference? Who will stand up and fight for that average American. I suggest that in the race for new ideas, I win with the experience: I've got the background to handle the toughest job on earth and I believe the American people are beginning to see that.⁸

In the New York debate of March 28, Mondale cleverly took the charge, used frequently by Gary Hart, that he was tied to the past, and instead showed his past experience had given him the experience necessary for leadership, rather than a commitment to past ideas. In the same debate, he quoted Menachem Begin with crediting him for being the "spirit of Camp David."⁹ In the Pittsburgh debate, he reminded his audience: "I've been in that White House...."¹⁰

There is another type of experience which is, perhaps, unique to this campaign which Mondale very subtly used in many of his speeches. Ronald Reagan managed to portray himself as the defender and protector of religious ideals in this campaign; thus, if you're religious, you would vote for Reagan, was the implication. Mondale frequently, in many of his speeches, reminded his audience of his father, the minister, thus trying to show that Reagan did not have a corner on the market.

MEMORABLE CLICHES

What campaign has not come up with its contribution to political lore of sayings that help to typify what the candidate stands for and the directions in which he will go. During Mondale's drive for the nominations, five contributions were made in this area.

The first of these was in the first debate at Dartmouth during an exchange with John Glenn. Who can forget the crispness, the originality of his reply when he described Glenn's figures as "baloney."¹¹

Perhaps his best contribution came in New Hampshire when he accused Reagan of "leadership by amnesia." When asked what he meant by the remark, he replied that "there's a lot of forgetfulness in this Administration."¹²

Another frequent saying came as the result of a question asked Mondale in early March about the shifting nature of the campaign. After a lengthy response, Mondale concluded with: "With Mondale, what you see is what you get." The statement was written down by Martin Kaplan, Mondale's deputy campaign manager for policy and speechwriting, and used frequently in later speeches.

Another cliché, with apologies to Wendy's Hamburgers, was the immortal "Where's the beef?" On a Saturday afternoon in his hotel room in Georgia, Mondale's campaign manager, Robert Beckel, got on his knees and acted out the hamburger commercial. The suggestion for using the commercial came from Beckel's fiancée, Mary Goehring, who worked in the Mondale campaign. Mondale had never seen or heard the quip, but he used it the next day in his campaign debate to attack what he considered Gary Hart's lack of substance with his "new ideas."¹³

A fifth, and final contribution, came in San Francisco during the month of May. Mondale attacked Reagan's foreign policy by contending that, if re-elected, the President would "present the people with a 'December surprise.'" That surprise would involve "American boys... fighting and dying in Central America."¹⁴

An insightful saying, a memorable slogan--these help to capture the imagination of the public as a candidate pursues the top office in our country. Perhaps one reason Mondale did not achieve this is because his attempts at sloganry were trite, mediocre, forgettable.

HOW PATHETIC!

Mondale did make some forays into the realms of emotional proof. In a number of his speeches, he made strong ethical-emotional appeals in an attempt to show that he is a "caring" person; he also appealed heavily to fairness. In the Atlanta debate, for instance, he made this plea:

We need a President who leads us toward justice, and I mean enforcing those civil rights acts, I mean ratifying that equal rights amendment, I mean standing up for Social Security and Medicare. This country must be fair, and the history of American is that when a President leads us toward fairness and toward our future, it can be done.¹⁵

Mondale closed the Chicago debate with this appeal:

A few days ago I toured the Belvedere and went through the Chrysler plant, and I had the privilege of driving out the millionth Omni car produced by Chrysler. It was a thrilling experience. And afterwards one of the workers came up to me and he said, "Mr. Mondale, thank you for helping us save our jobs." He said, "It saved my life, because I have worked here 19 years, and if Chrysler had gone down, so would I. My pension would be gone. I couldn't get another job--I've got gray hair, I know better than that. The plans for my children would be destroyed, and now thanks to the fact that we've saved this plant, life is great." He said everyone here feels the same way about it.

He also declared:

That is leadership, and it's based on two things. One, really caring about people. I do. And secondly, pulling people together to work for the best of our country. I'll do that. Give me your help.¹⁶

Mondale also utilized the fear appeal. In an emotional appeal closing out the New York debate, he recalled:

The night before I was sworn in as Vice President of the United States I had what they call "the briefing." It was in a secret -- top secret -- environment. A lot of it must remain classified, but I can say this. In that secret meeting they told me that I would be in the chain of command and had to be ready in case of a nuclear attack. They told me about the need to be close to someone within minutes who could help me if I needed to make the decision in the case of the incapacitation of the President. For four years that person was never more than minutes away except

in unusual circumstances. Even when I went fishing he was nearby. And the reason was, as they told me, that I might be called at any time in the middle of the night anytime--and told that Soviet missiles were coming in and I might have 10 minutes, eight minutes, maybe less to decide whether I would fire our missiles or not.

My whole life I fought to avoid the moment when the President, or someone in his behalf, would have to make that deadly choice. It could mean the end of the human species. On Tuesday ask which of us you think is best prepared and most committed to freeze these God-awful weapons, to press ahead for arms control and the reduction of those risks and lead us toward a safer world. Vote on Tuesday as though your life depends on it because it might.¹⁷

The television commercial considered by the Mondale staff as the most effective of the campaign used a strong fear appeal. It featured a ringing red telephone with a flashing light, and an announcer saying, "The most awesome powerful responsibility in the world lies in the hand that picks up this phone. The idea of an unsure, unsteady untested hand is something to really think about."¹⁸

In the acceptance speech, Mondale's pathos became so intense that, if it were not for certain key ideas, one would think he had come to the other convention. Let these excerpts speak for themselves as Mondale out-Reagans Reagan with patriotic and work-ethic appeals:

My dad was a preacher, and my mom taught music. We never had a dime. But we were rich in love and faith, and they taught me the values I've carried ever since....

In the last few weeks, I've deepened my admiration for someone who shares those values. Her immigrant father loved our country. Her widowed mother sacrificed for her family. And her own career is an American classic: Doing your work. Earning your way. Paying your dues. Rising on merit....

Tonight, we open a new door to the future. Mr. Reagan calls that "tokenism." We call it America...

We're fighting for the American future....

Mr. Reagan believes that the genius of America is in the boardrooms and exclusive country clubs. I believe that greatness can be found in the men and women who built out nation; do its work; and defend our freedom.

We will cut the deficit, reduce interest rates, make our exports affordable, and make America no. 1 again....

To countries that close their markets to us, my message is: We will not be pushed around any more. We will have a President who stands up for American workers and American businesses and American farmers....

By the start of the next decade, I want to walk into any store in America; pick up the best product, of the best quality, at the best price; turn it over; and read, "Made in the U.S.A."

In the acceptance speech, Mondale also sought to utilize a transfer device. After ending a harsh Democratic campaign, Mondale extended a conciliatory verbal olive branch as he attempted to gather in the backers of other candidates and leaders:

When we in this hall speak for America, it is America that is speaking. When we speak of family, the voice is Mario Cuomo's. When we speak of change, the words are Gary Hart's. When we speak of hope, the fire is Jesse Jackson's. When we speak of caring, the spirit is Ted Kennedy's. When we speak of patriotism, the strength is John Glenn's. When we speak of the future, the message is Geraldine Ferraro.

He also linked himself to past Democratic Presidents as he remembered Jimmy Carter as "an honest, caring man," and President Kennedy as one who was right when he said we "must never negotiate out of fear."¹⁹

AND THE BAND SNORED ON

Walter Mondale's stock of ideas is all right; his cliches had some impact, and at times, his emotional proof held promise. His ethical proof seemed solid. Why then, will the rhetoric of Walter Mondale be so easily forgotten? Besides some of the problems noticed

earlier in the paper, one final aspect of his rhetoric is an overriding negative one--his delivery has brought relief to thousands of insomniacs.

To understand his delivery, one must perhaps understand something about the private side of Walter Mondale. Bernard Weinraub describes the candidate as "a formal, private figure who refuses to be photographed with a cigar in his mouth or a drink in his hand, a politician who resists revealing himself to the public." Weinraub continues:

Privately, Mr. Mondale can be irreverent, self-deprecating, witty and engaging. But when he climbs off planes and faces television cameras to speak at rallies and in public forums, his voice turns reedy and his speeches ramble. He seems formal, even somewhat stiff.... "I'm not good on TV. It's just not a natural medium for me." ...What especially concerns the candidate's advisers is Mr. Mondale's difficulty selling himself and his message on television, a problem that makes his reticence a campaign liability.²⁰

There were times when he could loosen up, but they were rare. He utilized an effective attempt at humor when he told this joke on himself in his acceptance speech:

I remember late one night, as I headed from a speech in one city to a hotel a thousand miles away, someone said to me, "Fritz, I saw you on TV. Are those bags under your eyes natural." And I said: "No, I got them the old-fashioned way. I earned them." ²¹

Earlier in the campaign, he had said: "I'm not tired. But the Smithsonian called and wanted my eyeballs."²²

John Seigenthaler, publisher of the Nashville Tennessean, assessed the candidate in this way:

Mondale's best can barely match the most mediocre performance by Ronald Reagan, the politician-actor whose experiences before a camera have made him the best communicator in television history.

Noting that Mondale's voice seemed tired at the convention, Seigenthaler added: "For some reason, it always is."²³

This writer's observation of the Mondale acceptance speech confirms these comments. Mondale's delivery was too reserved, with little enthusiasm. His face was usually stiff, with a few moments in which he attempted to break into an uneasy smile. The speech, which lasted thirty-three minutes, on paper was not bad; the emotional proof was a little high as noticed earlier, but then this is typical for convention speeches. The delivery transformed what could have been a good effort into a rendezvous with dullness.

Perhaps part of the problem is an extremely low rate at which he allowed himself to speak--barely over 100 words a minute, even without polite applause. Sometimes at the end of a prepared point, as the audience starts to applaud, Mondale extemporizes and picks up the rate; he becomes more energetic and the response is better. Basically, however, he is too aloof, too reserved and does not come through to the television watcher as a personable communicator.

A FINAL WORD

These comments are limited to the rhetoric of Walter Mondale prior to the general campaign against President Ronald Reagan. They, no doubt, would be qualified by the outstanding performances he demonstrated in his television debates, and by the increased tempo witnessed in the final weeks of the campaign. By that time, however, the harm had been done. Mondale will be remembered as, for the most part, a communicator unable to overcome the tremendous lead the President had.

- ¹Bernard Weinraub, N.Y. Times, June 6, 1984
- ²N.Y. Times, July 22, 1984
- ³N.Y. Times, Jan. 16, 1984
- ⁴N.Y. Times, April 6, 1984
- ⁵N.Y. Times, April 27, 1984
- ⁶N.Y. Times, Jan. 16, 1984
- ⁷N.Y. Times, March 5, 1984
- ⁸N.Y. Times, March 19, 1984
- ⁹N.Y. Times, March 29, 1984
- ¹⁰N.Y. Times, April 6, 1984
- ¹¹N.Y. Times, Jan. 6, 1984
- ¹²Bernard Weinraub, N.Y. Times, Feb. 22, 1984
- ¹³Bernard Weinraub, N.Y. Times, June 6, 1984
- ¹⁴New York Times, May 16, 1984
- ¹⁵N.Y. Times, March 12, 1984
- ¹⁶N.Y. Times, March 19, 1984
- ¹⁷N.Y. Times, March 30, 1984
- ¹⁸Bernard Weinraub, N.Y. Times, June 8, 1984
- ¹⁹N.Y. Times, July 20, 1984
- ²⁰N.Y. Times, April 5, 1984

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²¹N.Y. Times, July 20, 1984

²²Bernard Weinraub, N.Y. Times, May 20, 1984

²³John Seigenthaler, Nashville Tennessean, July 22, 1984

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