

JOHN KENNETH WHITE / DANIEL M. SHEA

NEW PARTY POLITICS

**From Jefferson and
Hamilton to the
Information Age**

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Preface

In the *Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton wrote: "Every vital question of state will be merged in the question, 'Who will be the next president?'"¹ Hamilton's query was on the minds of his fellow citizens at the end of the eighteenth century. It is on our minds once more as we approach the twenty-first century. In the presidential contest that is already underway as we write this in the fall of 1999, no incumbent president will be listed on the ballot—the first time that has happened since 1988. Since the ratification of the Twenty-Second Amendment in 1951, no president has been allowed to serve more than two terms in office. Thus, Bill Clinton will retire to his New York estate, and his wife, Hillary, is poised to run for a vacancy created by the retirement of New York's senior U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. A prospective presidential contest between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore, not to mention Hillary Clinton's all-but-announced campaign for the Senate, ensures that 2000 will not be a run-of-the-mill election year.

Open-seat contests for the presidency are rare. Since 1952, there have only been three times when voters were asked to select a newcomer: 1960, 1968, and 1988. But the significance of these elections has varied. The 1960 John F. Kennedy–Richard M. Nixon contest was a struggle between former junior military officers who served during World War II over which one would replace President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had been a leading Army general during the war. The 1968 Richard M. Nixon–Hubert H. Humphrey–George C. Wallace election marked the introduction of social and cultural issues (including crime and the 1960s sexual revolution) that Republicans used to their advantage in the elections that followed. The 1988 George Bush–Michael S. Dukakis race was markedly less important—marred by debates about whether the Pledge of Allegiance should be said in public schools, and Dukakis's poor judgment in giving a weekend furlough pass to convicted criminal Willie Horton. Bush won, but his ideas ("read my lips, no new taxes") proved insufficient for governing.

The 2000 election promises to be much more important. Democratic and Republican operatives see this presidential contest as one that gives each party a unique opportunity to reposition itself for the new century. Hamilton's query notwithstanding, the next election is about much more than who will be the next president. It takes place in a new context: the infancy of the Information Age. Of course, the Information Age has been with us for some time. Computers, once commonplace in our offices, have moved into our homes. The Internet, with its capacity to take us places on the World Wide Web heretofore unimaginable, has altered the terms upon which voters and politicians interact. Web users can read the speeches of their favorite candidates; volunteers can sign up on-line; and e-precincts have added a

new dimension to political organizing. Political parties have had to adapt to these technological changes. The national Democratic and Republican parties have established their own Web pages, as have most of their state counterparts. Third parties have also found the World Wide Web to be an important resource. The Reform Party, Green Party, and Libertarian Party—just to name a few—have their own sophisticated Web sites that invite browsers to come aboard.

In one sense, this story of party change and adaptation is not new. Ever since their inception at the end of the eighteenth century, political parties have struggled to adapt to new conditions on the peculiar soil we call the United States. Their ability to conform to their environment has varied over time. During their heyday, extending from immediately after the Civil War until the 1930s, Democrats and Republicans built machines which were powerful instruments that organized elections and the administrations of government that followed. The demise of those machines has led many to bemoan the decline of parties—a “fact” much written about since the mid-twentieth century.

This book tells the story of political parties in America. It is a story of adaptation and renewal. We began this work with a bias toward strong parties—seeing them as necessary instruments for governance in such a large, diverse country as the United States. We conclude with this viewpoint intact. Unlike many of our colleagues, we are impressed with the ability of American parties to find new strengths in altered environments. To be sure, political parties “ain’t what they used to be.” The old urban machines have withered away, lingering in only a few places. Strong voter loyalties toward the Democrats and Republicans have also ebbed, as issues and candidates dominate how Americans act inside the privacy of the voting booth. But the Information Age is forcing parties to become more interactive—to use the wizardry of technology to communicate with a generation of new voters already comfortable with the tools of the Information Age.

But this text is more than a story about party evolution. Each of the chapters says much about who we are as Americans. Some years ago, Ronald Reagan declared: “A political party isn’t a fraternity. It isn’t something like the old school tie you wear. You band together in a political party because of certain beliefs of what government should be.”² For nearly two centuries, Democrats and Republicans have battled over such large ideas as Alexander Hamilton’s concept of a national family of Americans inextricably tied to one another (which meant a strong role for the federal government) and Thomas Jefferson’s preference for lightly governed local communities (which meant a less dominant role for the federal government). Our varied answers over time to this dispute says much about who we are and what kind of government (and society) we want.

This, then, is our story. Both of us have told it to our graduate and undergraduate students over the years. It seemed especially fitting to put our ideas into a larger parties textbook, a daunting task that many of our colleagues have wanted us to do for years. In this enterprise we have been supported by now former editors at Bedford/St. Martin’s, Beth Gillett and James Headley. Both provided words of encouragement when they were needed. We would like to thank those who have commented on all or parts of this book in its various stages: Cheryl L. Brown,

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We also owe a great debt to our wives, Yvonne and Christine, whose love and support sustained us every step of the way.

Finally, we dedicate this book to our children, Jeannette White and Abigail and Daniel Shea. They are too young to appreciate political parties—being much more interested in donkeys and elephants, instead of Democrats and Republicans. But they are destined to live out their lives in the new century, and the answers they give to the question, “What does it mean to be an American?” will say much about how parties will fare in the next millennium.

John Kenneth White

Daniel M. Shea

NOTES

1. Quoted in Emmet John Hughes, *The Living Presidency* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1973), 40.
2. Hugh Sidey, “A Conversation with Reagan,” *Time*, September 3, 1984.

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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Political Parties in the Information Age

On his first day as national chairman of the Democratic Party back in 1985, Paul Kirk received a large bouquet of flowers from his friend, Paul Sarbanes, a U.S. senator from Maryland. Kirk was delighted until he glanced at the enclosed card that read, "Rest in Peace." He promptly placed an angry telephone call to the Baltimore florist who had delivered the flowers. The man was profusely apologetic, saying a grievous mistake had been made. It seems that at a Greek Orthodox cemetery somewhere in Maryland there was a large floral arrangement on a fresh grave with a card that read, "Congratulations. You have a tough job ahead. Best of luck in your new position. Paul Sarbanes."¹

Some might say that misplaced bouquet is one sardonic indicator, among many, that political parties "ain't what they used to be." Indeed, as we enter the Information Age, most things ain't what they used to be. Change is the order of the day, and it affects how we live, work, and communicate. At home, family life is vastly different from *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Cosby Show*, once popular television programs that depicted "all-American" households barely recognizable now. Today, divorce, remarriage, blended families, and even gay couples challenge once-conventional standards. Relations between the sexes have also changed dramatically, as fathers *and* mothers frequently work outside the home. In some families, "househusbands" cook, clean, and care for the children—a reversal from stay-at-home moms Harriet Nelson and June Cleaver.

Our work habits have also changed—from the introduction of the home computer that has revolutionized the way information is organized to the Internet that has vastly altered the way we process and receive information. More and more people are staying at home to work on full-time jobs, or come home from work to surf the Internet and correspond around the world via e-mail with friends, acquaintances, and even people they don't know. Almost without warning, the Information Age has arrived, with its plethora of Internet resources and wired computers. Little more than a decade ago, the Internet connected approximately 600 computers; by the mid-1990s, that figure had expanded to more than 1 million computers which were linked to approximately 50,000 networks around the world. At this rate of growth, by the year 2005, the Internet will be in nearly 300 million homes with access to 3 million worldwide networks.²

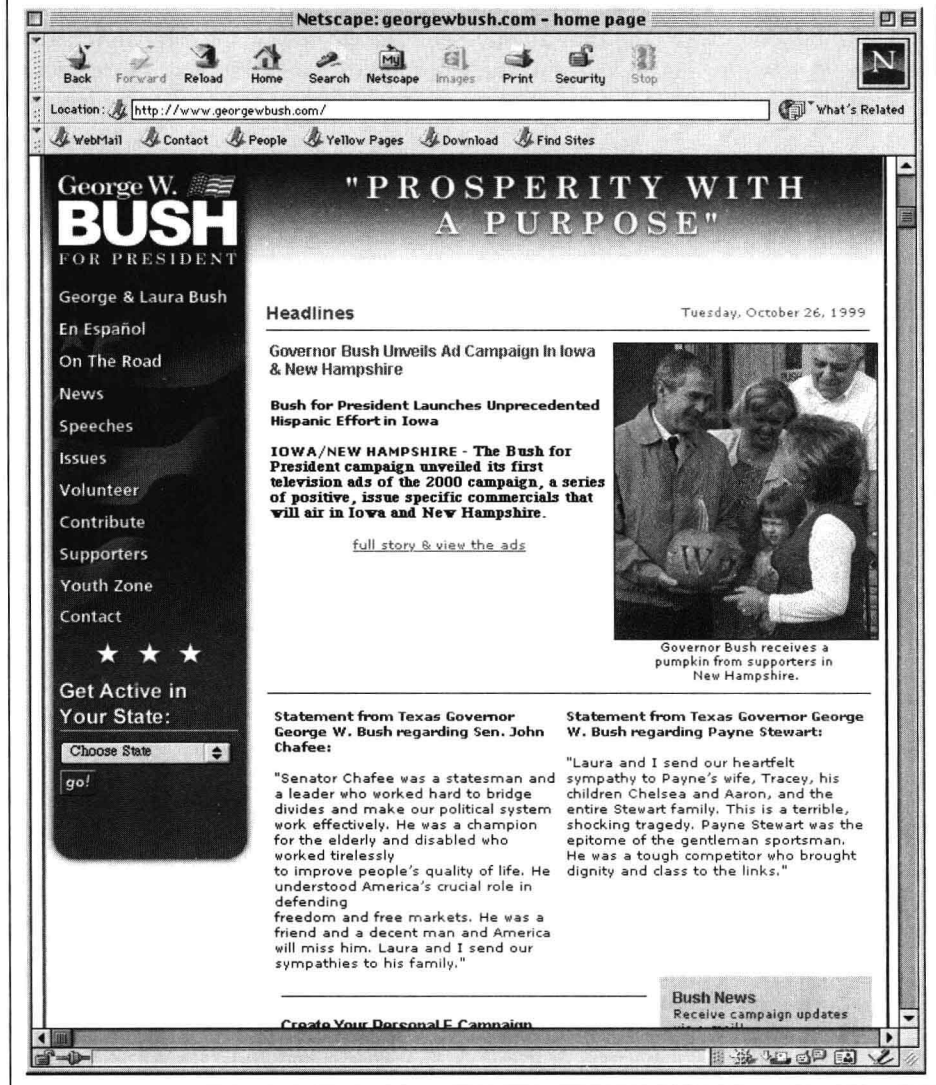
The Internet has made access to political leaders more readily available, as evidenced by the use of e-mails during the impeachment inquiry into President

Clinton's conduct during the Monica Lewinsky affair. Immediately after the release of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report calling for Clinton's impeachment, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry received more than 7,000 e-mails. New Jersey Democratic Representative Steve Rothman was likewise inundated, getting 763 e-mails during one eighteen-hour period. Responses varied from "IMPEACH" (followed by 97 exclamation points), to a Virginia woman who complained that "the Internet dumping of a one-sided prosecutor's 'report' was the most egregious affront to democratic principles in my lifetime."³ After Clinton was impeached by the House and the trial began in the Senate, the flood of e-mails rose to as many as 1 million per day.⁴

As the two parties begin the 2000 presidential campaign, the Internet has become an indispensable tool that no Information Age candidate can afford to ignore. Estimates place the number of Internet users in 1999 at 76 million, with 1 million new users logging on to the World Wide Web each month. One survey estimates that 70 percent of voting-age Americans will be on-line by election day 2000. Given these astounding figures, it is not surprising to learn that in the first days of Campaign 2000, presidential candidates were hastily investing large sums of cash into Web site development. On the Republican side, Steve Forbes has created one of the most sophisticated Web sites ever developed. Forbes, son of the wealthy publisher Malcolm Forbes, announced his candidacy on the Internet. His Web site includes new technologies such as the e-precinct, which encourages participants to enroll friends, forming "e-blocks," "e-neighborhoods," and even an "e-national committee." Forbes used his Web site to speak live to a town hall meeting in New Hampshire. In its first six weeks of operation, <Forbes2000.com> enrolled 12,720 volunteers and 1,620 e-precinct leaders, while racking up 20.3 million hits in 377,000 separate visits to the site. Rick Segal, who heads Web site development for Forbes, says: "We're reconstructing the old-fashioned ward and precinct system. I may not be the first person to invent a political machine, but I may be the first to create a political machine that's really a machine."⁵ Other Republican contenders have also developed their 2000 Web sites. Dan Quayle shelled out \$26,000 to get his Web page up and running—one of the biggest checks he wrote—before ending his candidacy. Pat Buchanan hired a webmaster at \$50,000 a year to develop his Web page. Lamar Alexander spent an initial \$20,000 on his Web site.⁶ Frontrunner, Texas Governor George W. Bush raised an astounding \$60 million in 1999, but initially spent a measly \$15,000 to get his Web site up and running.⁷ (See Figure I.1.)

Democrats also have been avid users of Information Age technologies. Democratic National Chairman Joe Andrew, himself a true believer, has noted, "All politics is local, but local has been redefined."⁸ In the Information Age, people often associate with fellow enthusiasts on the Internet. Andrew applied this knowledge to Internet politics. Prior to becoming Democratic national chairman, in 1996 and again in 1998, Andrew blended Indiana's voter files with data about age, race, income, religion, magazine subscriptions, and the like to gather detailed information on the state's voters. He gave CD-ROM disks with that information to local organizers, who used it for calls, mailings, and door-to-door canvassing. They in turn enhanced the database with new, more personalized information gathered

FIGURE I.1 ■ Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush is one of several GOP candidates to have his own Web site.



along the way. That information was credited with boosting voter turnout, and Democrats elected more new officeholders in Indiana during these two elections than in any year since 1932. Vice President Al Gore selected Andrew to be Democratic National Chairman and instructed him to apply the same technologies to the 2000 presidential race. Andrew sees his job this way: "There are fifty counties in America who may determine who's the next president."⁹ By targeting individuals in