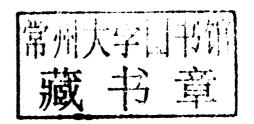# manipulating democracy

Democratic Theory, Political Psychology, and Mass Media

Edited by Wayne Le Cheminant and John M. Parrish

Manipulating Democracy

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Manipulation is a source of pervasive anxiety in contemporary American politics. Observers charge that manipulative practices in political advertising, media coverage, and public discourse have helped to produce an increasingly polarized political arena, an uninformed and apathetic electorate, election campaigns that exploit public fears and prejudices, a media that titillates rather than educates, and a policy process that too often focuses on the symbolic rather than substantive.

Manipulating Democracy offers the first comprehensive dialogue between empirical political scientists and normative theorists on the definition and contemporary practice of democratic manipulation. This impressive array of distinguished scholars—political scientists, philosophers, cognitive psychologists, and communications scholars—collectively draws out the connections between competing definitions of manipulation, the psychology of manipulation, and the political institutions and practices through which manipulation is seen to produce a tightly knit exploration of an issue at the heart of democratic politics.

Wayne Le Cheminant is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Loyola Marymount University. He studies contemporary political theory, political culture, identity and gender issues, and how ideas and ideology impact political institutions.

John M. Parrish is Associate Professor of Political Science at Loyola Marymount University. He is the author of *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand.*

For Ian, Zoe, and Greyson
and
for Robin

Preface and Acknowledgments

On February 9, 2008, at the height of the most fiercely fought presidential primary contest in living memory, the Institute for Leadership Studies at Loyola Marymount University hosted seven scholars of political theory, political psychology, and media studies for its 7th annual Dilemmas of Democracy Conference on the topic "Manipulating Democracy." Seven of the essays collected here were first presented at that conference: those of Terence Ball, James Fishkin, Shanto Iyengar and Kyu Hahn, Lawrence Jacobs, George Lakoff, Rose McDermott, and Andrew Sabl. Three additional essays were later commissioned to complete the volume: those by Richard Fox and Amy Gangl, Nathaniel Klemp, and Christina Tarnopolsky. Our most significant debt is therefore to these twelve individuals who so generously said yes when we invited them to be part of this endeavor.

If the present volume would not have been possible without the Dilemmas of Democracy Conference, the conference itself would not have been possible without the help and support of many of our faculty, administrative, and student colleagues at LMU. Our first thanks must go to Michael Genovese, Director of the Institute for Leadership Studies, who greenlighted the conference topic, helped assemble the list of invited guests, served as host for the conference, and offered valuable counsel throughout the process. LMU's Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts and its then-Dean Michael Engh generously provided the funding for the conference in cooperation with the Institute. Our colleagues in the political science department, specifically Evan Gerstmann, Lance Blakesley, Jodi Finkel, Richard Fox, Fernando Guerra, Janie Steckenrider, and Seth Thompson, provided invaluable help and support throughout the conference in a variety of ways. One colleague deserves special mention. Ngoc Nguyen, our department administrator, ably managed the full range of logistical issues related to the conference, bringing to the task her characteristic calm and efficiency. Vivian Valencia ably led a team of student volunteers who provided valuable assistance throughout the conference, including especially, but not necessarily limited to, Mercedes Adams, Lucy Boyadzhyan, Raquel Castellanos, Gena Gammie, and Christina McCaffrey.

Others helped substantially in the process of turning the conference essays and the additional contributed essays into the present volume. Michael Kerns at Routledge commissioned the volume and helped guide us through the process of assembling a complete manuscript. We also appreciate the efforts of Matthew Streb in encouraging Routledge to review and eventually back the project. The staff of EvS Communications undertook the copy editing and saw the manuscript through the production process. Brendan Richards assisted substantially in the editing and formatting of most of the essays. Elizabeth Chitty assembled the index. Acknowledgement of the various helpful comments and criticisms offered regarding the essays is made by their authors in the endnotes of each chapter.

We owe special debts of appreciation to our families, who in the weeks leading up to the event heard all too often about "the conference" as excuse for our occasional deficiencies in our familial duties. John Parrish has relied as always on the love and friendship of his wife Lynn, dog George, and (in recent months) daughter Sophie as a motive and reward for his work. Wayne Le Cheminant wants to thank Monique for her support and patience during a particularly trying time in her life at the time this conference took place, and he always relies on the antics and amazing spirits of his children Ian, Zoe, and Greyson to make life not just bearable, but a pleasure.

We dedicate this book with love to Wayne's children, Ian, Zoe, and Greyson Le Cheminant, and to John's sister, Robin Parrish McAlister.

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Lawrence R. Jacobs is the Walter F. and Joan Mondale Chair for Political Studies and director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. He also is a professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Political Science. Jacobs' most recent books are *Inequality and American Democracy* (with Theda Skocpol, Russell Sage Press, 2005), *Healthy, Wealthy, and Fair* (with James Morone, Oxford University Press, 2005), and *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (with Robert Y. Shapiro, University of Chicago Press, 2000), the last of which won the Goldsmith Book Prize from Harvard University's Shorenstein Center for Press and Politics, the Neustadt Book Prize from the American Political Science Association, and the Distinguished Book Prize in political sociology from the American Sociological Association. He also authored *The Health of Nations: Public Opinion and the Making of Health Policy in the U.S. and Britain* (Cornell University Press, 1993) as well as several edited volumes and numerous articles in the *American Political Science Review*, *World Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, *Journal of Politics*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, and other scholarly outlets.

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George Lakoff is the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, and is also the co-founder and Senior Fellow of the Rockridge Institute. He has published a multitude of articles in major scholarly journals and edited volumes. In addition to perhaps his most influential book, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed., (University of Chicago Press, 2002), he is also the author of *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About The Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1987) and co-author of *Metaphors We Live By* (with Mark Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 1980), *More Than Cool Reason* (with Mark Turner, University of Chicago Press, 1989), *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge To The Western Tradition* (with Mark Johnson, Basic Books, 1999), and *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics Into Being* (with Rafael Núñez, Basic Books, 2000). His most recent books include *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values, Frame the Debate* (Chesea Green, 2004), *Whose Freedom?* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), and *Thinking Points* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006).

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John M. Parrish is Associate Professor of Political Science at Loyola Marymount University. His teaching and research focus especially on political ethics, the history of political thought, and political rhetoric and public discourse. He has published a book, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), as well as articles in such journals as the *Historical Journal*, *History of Political Thought*, and *International Theory*. He is also co-editor of *Damned If You Do: Moral Dilemmas in Literature and Popular Culture* (with Margaret Hrezo, Lexington Books, 2010). His next book project, co-authored with Alex Tuckness, is tentatively entitled *The Death of Mercy*.

Andrew Sabl is Associate Professor of Public Policy and Political Science at the University of California at Los Angeles. A political theorist, Sabl's research focuses on political ethics, democratic and constitutional theory, theories of toleration and political pluralism, and, most recently, the political theory of David Hume. His book, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2002), won the Leo Strauss Award of the American Political Science Association for the best dissertation in political philosophy. His many articles include work appearing or forthcoming in *Political Theory*, the *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *Polity*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, *NOMOS*, the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, the *Election Law Journal*, *Society*, and *Public Integrity*.

Christina Tarnopolsky is Associate Professor of Political Science at McGill University. Her research interests include classical political philosophy, contemporary social theory, aesthetics and politics, and the role of the emotions in politics. She is the author of *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton University Press, 2010). She has also published book chapters and articles in such journals as *Political Theory* and *The Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*. She is now engaged in a book project provisionally entitled *Perspectives on Aesthetic Politics: Plato, Nietzsche, and Foucault*.

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A Reappraisal

Wayne Le Cheminant and John M. Parrish

Manipulation is a source of pervasive anxiety in American politics, and more so today than at any time in recent memory. Accusations of manipulative practices in political advertising, media coverage, and public discourse have become increasingly widespread. Many observers claim that the American public finds itself more and more vulnerable to the manipulative practices of elites, and that the effects of manipulation are becoming more and more damaging to contemporary democracy. Among the host of societal evils which these observers attribute to the rising tide of political manipulation, some of the most egregious include: an increasingly polarized and antagonistic form of partisan politics; an uninformed and apathetic electorate; a consultant-driven mode of election campaigning that frequently exploits public fears and prejudices; a media motivated by commercial values and by the desire to titillate rather than educate; and a policy process that too often seems to produce results of symbolic rather than substantive value.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Consider for a moment the range of contemporary political practices from the last two decades that might be characterized as fundamental manipulations of democracy:

- Political campaigns and interest groups utilize attack ads such as the "Willie Horton," "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," and "Kerry and the Wolves" ads, to influence the outcome of two presidential elections.[1]
- High-powered lobbyists and campaign donors such as John Huang and Jack Abramoff offer millions of dollars in illegal or improper campaign contributions, and major oil and gas contributors meet privately with Vice President Dick Cheney to suggest legal language (later adopted verbatim) for the country's energy policy.[2]
- President Bill Clinton's political adversaries orchestrate two major ongoing investigations of dubious credibility—the "Whitewater"

investigation and the Paula Jones lawsuit—eventually costing hundreds of millions in public funds, and resulting in the president's impeachment. Confronted with these investigations, the president himself breaks or at least severely bends the law by concealing relevant facts, and helps to orchestrate a merciless smear campaign against at least one apparently truthful witness, Monica Lewinsky.[3]

- Politicians from presidents on down employ micro-targeted polling techniques to determine not just which public policy initiatives to promote and how to sell them, but also such matters as where the president should vacation, or what breed of presidential pet will best fit the president's desired image.[4]
- Critics advance the serious and plausible suggestion that the Bush administration "manipulated" the country into war through a variety of techniques: controlled leaks to the press, exploitation of jingoistic sentiment, cherry-picking of vital intelligence, persecution or ostracism of war critics, and a campaign of image management and stagecraft designed to reinforce the government's daily message at the expense of a full public dialogue on the question of war.[5]
- Less consequentially, but perhaps even more disturbingly, much of what we perceive as "media coverage" is itself increasingly subject to being co-opted or shaped backstage to suit political agendas. When the Bush administration seemingly licenses its own partisans to act as fake reporters asking questions in the White House press room, or creates an entirely staged press conference with administration staffers posing as reporters before the unsuspecting public, we seem to have crossed the line from mere spin control to something approaching Orwellian mind control.[6]

Although examples of political manipulation are as widespread as is concern about its effects, our scholarly understanding of what manipulation is, what is wrong with it, and what factors facilitate or inhibit its practice has not kept pace with the rising public concern it engages. Though we are very aware that manipulation occurs in contemporary democracies, scholars across a wide range of fields are only now coming to grips with some of the deep-seated cognitive, emotional, and linguistic factors that make manipulation possible, and with some of the rapidly changing institutional factors that threaten to expand dramatically its scope and significance. Cognitive science and linguistic analysis have begun to show us why manipulation may be a more intractable problem than we have yet appreciated, while the speed and scale of institutional changes that facilitate manipulation are accelerating at an alarming rate. Yet our scholarly understanding of manipulation lags behind the expanding use of manipulative techniques, and unless our understanding can begin to catch up to the scale and scope of the changes which manipulation itself is