

POLITICAL REELISM: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF REFLECTION AND
INTERPRETATION IN POLITICAL FILMS

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to discuss how political campaigns and politicians have been depicted in films, and how the films function rhetorically through the use of core values. By interpreting real life, political films entertain us, perhaps satirically poking fun at familiar people and events. However, the filmmakers complete this form of entertainment through the careful integration of American values or through the absence of, or attack on those values. This study provides a rhetorical criticism of movies about national politics, with a primary focus on the value judgments, political consciousness and political implications surrounding the films *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *The Contender* (2000), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Power* (1986), and *Primary Colors* (1998).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose and Research Questions.....	1
Review of Literature.....	4
Procedure and Method.....	14
Organization of the Study.....	23
CHAPTER TWO: RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL FILMS.....	24
<i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939).....	25
<i>The Candidate</i> (1972).....	28
<i>Power</i> (1986).....	30
<i>Primary Colors</i> (1998).....	35
<i>Wag the Dog</i> (1997).....	38
<i>The Contender</i> (2000).....	41
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER THREE: AMERICAN VALUES AND POLITICAL REFLECTION.....	47
<i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939).....	48
<i>The Candidate</i> (1972).....	57
<i>Power</i> (1986).....	62
<i>Primary Colors</i> (1998).....	67
<i>Wag the Dog</i> (1997).....	75
<i>The Contender</i> (2000).....	78
Summary.....	82

CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS.....	85
Technology and Media Usage.....	85
Political Advisors.....	92
Products of Time.....	101
Summary.....	105
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	109
Conclusion.....	109
Political Reflection.....	116
<i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939).....	116
<i>The Candidate</i> (1972).....	117
<i>Power</i> (1986).....	118
<i>Primary Colors</i> (1998).....	119
<i>Wag the Dog</i> (1997).....	121
<i>The Contender</i> (2000).....	122
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	126

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As I run into my apartment, turn on the television, and flip channels in a mad dash to get to *General Hospital* before the first commercial break, I run across plenty of movies. These movies range in genre from westerns, thrillers, dramas, romantic comedies, and political films. While changing channels, I do not think about the values these movies depict, never mind their rhetorical potential. More than likely, my first inclination is that they are filler just taking up space until the nightly news and then primetime television. However, each of these movies may have a rhetorical effect; and that effect potentially affected the attitudes and actions of members of the audience.

As we sit with or without our popcorn and watch movies, many of us just want to escape the day-to-day bustle that is our lives, but with their social, political, or religious message, films have an effect whether we recognize it or not. Often, they shape the way we see the world, they shape how we make sense of the world, and they contribute to a change in our view of societal issues.

Political films can be especially interesting in that as we watch, we compare and contrast politicians on film to their real-life counterparts. Filmmakers and screenwriters often have a social agenda, and sometimes it is just a coincidence. However, we cannot deny the fact that audiences tend to look at political films with a critical eye, for movies attempt to interpret and challenge our lives.

Purpose and Research Questions

I have always had a personal interest in politics, because I come from a political family. Both of my parents hold elected offices and have for the last twenty years. With each of their

elections, I act as their campaign manager, speechwriter, advertising manager, and most importantly their moral support. Having experienced political life first hand, I cannot help but be fascinated with all of the aspects of it. Therefore, I have an interest in political rhetoric in any form.

The purpose of this study is to view and discuss how political campaigns and politicians have been depicted in films, and how the movies function rhetorically and appeal to core values. By interpreting real life, political films entertain us, perhaps satirically poking fun at familiar people and events. However, the filmmakers complete this form of entertainment through the careful integration of American values or through the absence of, or attack on those values. In some cases, film mirrors our commitment to values, and in other cases film mock the values Americans usually cherish. For instance, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) depicts a good hearted man with integrity who wants to better his country, and *Wag the Dog* (1997) on the contrary, illustrates grand illusions in politics and the naiveté of the American public.

This study provides a rhetorical criticism of movies about national electoral politics from a mainstream perspective, with a primary focus on the value judgments made in the films *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *The Contender* (2000), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Power* (1986), and *Primary Colors* (1998). This rhetorical analysis is organized around the research questions:

1. How do political films function rhetorically, through their interpretation of political events?
2. How do political films reflect the political consciousness of society through the depiction of American values?

3. What are the political implications of that consciousness as demonstrated through the conduct of political campaigns and the actions of politicians?

I have chosen the films listed above to answer these questions for two reasons. First, they represent several years of political action. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, for instance, was made in 1939, while *The Contender* was made in 2000. I have over 60 years of political films represented on this list. Secondly, these films represent several different types of political situations. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) is included on my list because it has historical significance and can act as a measuring stick to determine how films have changed over the years, and also look at whether standards have changed in terms of what constitutes a political scandal.

Wag the Dog (1997) and *Primary Colors* (1998) are noted for their accurate reflections of the time period they were released. *Primary Colors* (1998) is loosely based on President Clinton's 1992 bid for the White House and paints a colorful picture of that campaign. This film is important to include since it has nonfiction implications focusing on a Presidential election. *Wag the Dog* (1997), on the other hand, was never meant to tell a true story, however, as it turned out it rang truer than anyone could have imagined. The plot focuses on an onscreen Presidential sexual misconduct scandal and shortly after it was released, the real life President found himself in a similar situation. Both of these films have interpretations of real life events, and I found them important stories to analyze.

The Contender (2000) explores gender roles in politics. A Midwestern Senator finds herself bidding for the Vice Presidency after the acting Vice President passes away. She has to fight a battle that a man in her position would have never had to fight. This film is important to include because as we inch closer to the next Presidential election, the possibility of a woman in

one of the top two positions in the Executive Branch is looking much more like nonfiction than fiction.

Finally, *Power* (1986) and *The Candidate* (1972) illustrate the important role of political advisors and how they influence the political establishment. *The Candidate* (1972) is a film with a protagonist who loves his country and wants to make a difference to the under privileged people in the state of California. After his advisors teach him how to campaign he forgets who is he and why he is running for election. *Power* (1986), is a film about political consultants told from the consultant's point of view. A high-powered, smooth operating consultant learns why it is important to get the right man elected and follow his heart and not just his wallet. I included both of these films because political consultants are a reality in today's political campaigns. When a candidate gives a speech, we may very well be getting canned ideas straight from a consultant rather the candidate's ideals and visions for the constituency he or she is trying to represent. I could have included several other film combinations, however for this study, these films best represent the vast range of situations and scenarios that do occur in political reality and ensure an authentic reflection of that reality.

Literature Review

As audiences, we often form opinions of who we are and who the people around us are from what we see in movies and on television. For example, people may think they understand what the presidency is about from watching movies like *The American President* (1995), *Dave* (1993) or *Absolute Power* (1997). Do they equal each other, or are real life campaigns more dramatic and wrought with scandal, or do the movie campaigns embellish the drama of real life campaigns? Perlmutter (1999) suggests that real life campaigns and politicians do have the drama and scandal of the big screen. The release of *Primary Colors* (1998) and its claim to be

“loosely based” on the 1992 Clinton campaign caused quite the sensation in the media because of the scandal and drama illustrated in the film. That is just one example of the potential for political scandal and drama in both real life and on film. These assertions posit the theory that political movies have rhetorical potential.

First, I will define political films. I agree with Scott (2000) who states, all movies may seem political, however they are not. All films are ideological and used to design and change public attitudes toward matters of social and political importance. Keyishian (2003) agrees, “all films are political in that they express assumptions about class, conduct, values, and the social order.” So for this project I am looking only at films that are narrowly concerned with electoral politics or those that portray politicians, political offices, and political campaigns.

Similarly, Davies and Wells (2002) identify two different types of politics. There are the “Big P politics” and the “Little p politics.” Big P politics deal with the democratic, strategic, and governmental politics. Little p politics is localized, personal, and unstable. Many of the films made in this genre cover one or both of these definitions. The films I study fall under the category of Big P politics.

The Rhetoric of Film

Over the last twenty-five years the rhetoric of film has become a prevalent topic in many academic journals. The pervasive nature of movies and their ability to affect our actions and feelings, as well as mirror the social mood of the era proved that films do, indeed, have rhetorical potential. Frenz and Rushing (1993) for example, explored the rhetorical potential of *Jaws* (1975) and found that this film is a recent installment of the American hunter myth. They combined ideological and archetypal concerns and found that this film portrays the powerless every person in a rhetorical struggle fused with heroic hatred and innocence.

Rushing (1989) studied *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) and the patriarchal co-optation of the feminine archetype. She looked at these movies from the lens of the “new frontier” and discusses the myth’s influence on American literature and rhetoric. They speculate that this myth reflects the self-concept of America and molds its personality.

Frentz and Farrell (1975) used *The Exorcist* (1973) to explain how film can depict the social mood of an era. Americans were disillusioned when this film came out, family values had changed, secular trends replaced religion, and politically, Americans were troubled over the various scandals of the time. We had a struggle between the positivistic evil and the transcendent good. *The Exorcist* was the first work that demonstrated this struggle in a rhetorically compelling manner. This film functions rhetorically in that it traces the impact of the film on the audience’s psychological participation and identification with the actual process the characters embody in the film.

Rushing and Frentz (1980) analyzed the rhetoric of the warrior by looking specifically at *The Deer Hunter* (1978). This film took a controversial look at the Vietnam War and won several Academy Awards. Rushing and Frentz analyzed this film using the rhetoric of war as their critical lens. The film critics of the time had mixed feeling about the film, in fact the various interpretations and critiques of the film are the reasons Rushing and Frentz were interested in this study. The critics who praised it looked at it as an artistic event, with a message that went far beyond the subject of war. Those who condemned it only saw the literal depiction of war and the implications of our involvement in the war. In this particular case the authors were interested in the effects of the film on the audience.

Martha Solomon (1983) studied the villainless quest of *Chariots of Fire* (1981). This film was British produced yet, had a profound effect, and found great success in the United States. Solomon was fascinated by the reception the film found here in America. She identified several strategies the film used that underlie its popularity. The film uses simple metaphor within a sports movie genre. The film is set within a historical context, with very human characters that the audience can root for and relate to on many levels.

Movies set in a historical setting typically have an enhanced rhetorical force. This film is no exception. The events portrayed in this film happened more than sixty years prior to its release. This gave the film a certain timelessness that strengthened the lessons communicated (Solomon, 1983).

I consider the studies cited as excellent illustration of solid scholarship in rhetoric and film. Rushing and Frenztz, in particular, use myth and metaphor to generate insights into culture and gender extracted from popular films that many might have been overlooked. These studies build an argument in favor of the critical study of film however there is no mention of the importance of political film, especially to the scale that I put forward.

Feminist Rhetoric in Television and Film

In the previous section, I focused on the feminist undertones of popular film however; this section is dedicated to feminist criticism within popular mediated artifacts. This section will lay the foundation for the section of my study that focuses on women in the political establishment. I begin by discussing women in popular television programs.

thirtysomething

Loeb (1990) uncovered the hegemonic rhetoric in the fictional television series “*thirtysomething*.” This series is seemingly progressive, yet deceptively conservative in its

construction of reality. This conservatism is affirmed in its traditional views of gender roles, and the marital unit within a conventional family. "*thirtysomething*" supports the dominant patriarchal ideology and champions narrowly defined lifestyles within a very conservative framework. In the series, the ideal/troubled marriage and the maintenance of the family unit are defined in very traditional terms; "*thirtysomething*" champions the dominant patriarchal ideology and accepts a conservative, narrowly defined lifestyle.

The ideal/troubled marriage paradox serves as a rhetorical, hegemonic mechanism in *thirtysomething*. First, it encourages the acceptance of traditional gender roles. Second, the existence of the ideal/troubled marriage dichotomy could raise sociological issues or questions, but these questions do not address the rightness or naturalness of traditional gender roles (Loeb, 1990). Women are portrayed as strong individuals within the show but only within the framework that their traditional gender role allows them. This series is a strong example of the progressive struggle much of the programming of the 1980s experienced.

Hanke (1990) also examines the series "*thirtysomething*" for its discursive construction of masculinity. The author's analysis is founded on at least two viewings of each episode broadcast from December 20, 1988, through May 1990, and studies of reviews and articles. The dialogue, situations, outcomes, and characters were studied and analyzed in terms of three questions. First, how are images of men demonstrated in this series? Second, how are "critiques" of patriarchal ideology illustrated? Third, how are ideological factors of this "new view of manhood," like "sensitivity," linked to a middle-class therapeutic culture and ideology?

Hanke (1990) posits that the series, through its specific articulation of a "new view of manhood," represents a compromised version of hegemonic masculinity that is able to convey and contain elements of liberal feminist ideology, while remaining implicit with dominant

gender ideology. This article, again, illustrates the interesting dialectic struggle that was inherent in the 1980s culture. The feminist backlash was evident and seriously progressive television programming was taboo for the time (Hanke, 1990).

Mary Tyler Moore and Murphy Brown

Dow (1990) examines *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as an illustration of television programming that responded to the changes brought on by the feminist movement of the late 1960s. It provides a short review of feminist ideology and perspectives on popular culture and discusses television as a space for feminist critique and analysis. To accompany a critique of space, it is also important to look at the paradoxical relationship between space and place in this series. The place is very patriarchal, yet Mary is granted the opportunity to be progressive within her own personal space. The authoritativeness of the place however, is still dominant (Dow, 1990).

Additionally, the article details the hegemonic effects, especially in the negotiation of oppositional ideology. Dow (1990) also uses this series to exemplify conclusions about the workings of hegemonic devices that contradict feminist ideology on television. This critique is used as the foundation for discussing further possibilities of an awareness of hegemony for a feminist analysis of television.

Much feminist rhetorical criticism has described women as strong communicators; however, many other analyses of women exemplify the existence of rhetoric that devalues women. For example, *Murphy Brown* illustrates how the title character of the series performs a patriarchal interpretation of the excesses of liberal feminist ideology (Dow, 1992). This series functions to strengthen the dichotomy between femininity and feminism. This is an intrinsic

issue within liberal feminism that demonstrates the need for more critical attention to the range of feminist theories available for the analysis of rhetorical artifacts.

An interpretation of femininity and feminism for popular audiences would enrich the understanding of patriarchal rhetorical strategies when studying that particular type of television discourse. A radical feminist perspective would interpret Murphy's problems as symptoms of oppression by a system of male dominance, not of her own personal failure. This would suggest that her problems are beyond her personality (Dow, 1992).

Feminism and film: Groundhog Day (1993) and The Snake Pit (1948)

Daughton (1996) uses the film *Groundhog Day* (1993), to examine its rhetorical potential using Rushing's (1993) description of the mythic struggle between Power, Other, and Spirit and Bakan's (1966) discussion of agency and communion. The study of the rhetorical structure of the film is informed by gender studies, feminist criticism, rhetorical criticism, and media criticism. This study analyzes the film's symbolic framework using ideological perspectives. Viewers are given a sensible guide toward achieving wholeness and transcendence. The male protagonist undergoes a mystical feminine initiation rite of descent. This type of transcendence is rare in contemporary films (Daughton, 1996).

In *Groundhog Day* (1993), Phil Connors (Bill Murray) is stuck reliving the same day over and over and is forced to let go of rigid sex roles and the behaviors associated with them, and he replaced them with kinder gentler actions. Thus, *Groundhog Day* (1993) offers, through the character's feminization, an optimistic possibility for the renegotiation of Power, Other, and Spirit and the balancing of agency and communion (Daughton, 1996).

Fishbein (1983) examines the film, *The Snake Pit* (1948) as a rhetorical artifact. In the film, the heroine suffers a mental breakdown after moving across the country with her husband

to follow his career aspirations. Her husband is terribly unsuccessful at his chosen endeavors, and she is extremely unhappy and unsatisfied as a homemaker. She feels that she can do more with her life, especially after having seen how productive women can be as contributing members of society during WWII when they were taking the men's places while they were overseas. Since working was not a viable option for her because of the social stigma attached to it, she could only sit back and watch her financial situation deteriorate rapidly because of her husband's inability to "be a man" and bring home the bacon, so to speak. This stress drove her to a mental breakdown, and she was ultimately committed to a state mental institution. *The Snake Pit* is best known for its portrayal of "real state" state mental institutions from the first half of the 20th century, but it does tell a compelling story of a woman caught between ambition and the gender roles that they are required to play by society (Fishbein, 1983).

The previous sections illustrate that feminist criticism of media is timely and within the consciousness of many scholars. It also builds the argument that this is a worthwhile avenue to explore. However, many of these studies are weak, predictable, and uninformed. For instance, Hanke (1990) based his criticism on two viewings of each episode and reading the reviews of others. Fortunately, there are two insightful and well-informed studies that bode well for the future of feminist criticism. Daughton (1996) and Fishbein (1983) excavate fascinating issues and dilemmas within the films they studied. Transcendental complexity within the framework of a screwball-esque romantic comedy, and mental hospitals acting as metaphor for an ambitious woman's life and her inability to live it in a self actualizing fashion is the type of media criticism this study will accomplish. Two studies out of five is certainly not representative, it is a small sample of the scholarship available and an example of what is missing in academic study. This

study will contribute to, and fill the void left by many rhetorical and feminist scholars by uncovering the deeper implications behind the dialogue and bright lights.

Political Films as Ideology

Up until now my review has focused on film and television studies that focuses on nonspecific concepts and issues. The following studies are film reviews printed in popular political magazines from the left, right, and those that claim to sell impartiality. This section builds the argument that film interpretation does not only fall into academic categories.

“In the 1980s, a group of rural Colorado high schoolers battled Soviet and Cuban soldiers who had invaded the United States. A heroic American Boxer knocked out a vicious, steroid taking Russian heavy weight. And an ex Green Beret returned to Vietnam and singled handedly mowed down hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers, avenging our country’s only loss in war” (Murray, 2000). In the 1980s we were very consumed with war and patriotism as a country (Strada, 1998). Government officials were constantly reminding us that we were in the midst of a Cold War with the Soviets. Nearly 50 films were made in the early 1980s with a similar theme, beating or fighting Russia (Murray, 2000).

At the turn of the decade there was an obvious shift in the kinds of movies being made. Films started to paint a more positive picture of Russia (Murray, 2000). Movies started to be slightly and indirectly more critical of the United States. Patriotism and the “shining city on the hill” were no longer central ideas within features of the time (Murray, 2000). The Iran Contra hearings and perceptions of American Greed started to replace patriotism (Murray, 2000).

This interesting shift in tensions happened gradually, but by the mid 1990s became more and more obvious (Murray, 2000). For example, *Platoon* (1986) was a critique of the Vietnam Conflict, *Wall Street* (1987) was a social commentary on American Greed, and *The Hunt for Red*

October (1990) was a critique on the Cold War. Why all of a sudden did this change? Why were films beginning to be critical of the government and not only supporting the status quo?

During the Clinton White House skepticism became blatant cynicism (Murray, 2000). Every day there was a new investigation into some kind of scandal. *Wag the Dog* (1997) portrayed a President in the midst of scandal who creates a military diversion to take the attention away from him and his sexual misdeeds (Davies, 2002). *Primary Colors* (1998) is a pseudo biography of Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign and had characters that were recognizable as Clinton's advisors. A Jennifer Flowers-like affair surfaced as well as an unwanted pregnancy. All of these "situations" mirrored the scandals that were plaguing the Clinton White House (Perlmutter, 1999).

President Clinton was certainly not the first President to have extramarital affairs, and I suspect he will not be the last. However, all of a sudden the sexual misdeeds were headline news. The President was no longer looked at with unconditional respect (Murray, 2000). The country was beginning to question authority more and more and be overtly critical of leaders.

There were a few exceptions, one of them being *The American President* (1995). This film painted the President in a positive light (Murray, 2000). Rob Reiner, the director, changed the tone of political movies by characterizing a President with all of the qualities he would want in a President. Reiner stated it was, "wish fulfillment" (Carson, 1999). Reiner created a President he would like to see in the White House. This was not overt criticism, however it was critical, he had to *create* the character and not mirror whom we had in real life.

Strada (1998) notes that an interesting phenomenon has taken place within contemporary political films. These films are no longer reflecting life they are anticipating life. *Wag the Dog*

(1997) and *Primary Colors* (1998) are cases in point. If a movie takes two years from concept to finish these movies predicted the presidency.

Regardless of the imitation or predictions, Hollywood avoids ideology. In order to avoid political debate, filmmakers focus primarily on corruption and scandal (Carson, 1999).

Brookhiser (1998) states that despite various attempts, the big screen does not understand the politicians we see on the news every night. This could be a reason for avoiding ideology. Since few people actually do understand the people behind the policy, audiences tend to enjoy the distortion. Scott (2000) states that political films mirror political choices, but they get distorted in the movie making process. This is most likely because they are keeping their audience in mind and emphasizing entertainment over information.

The literature reviewed in this section helps to build the argument that the rhetorical study of film is necessary to help us understand the political consciousness and social implications of political films. The films discussed in this section function symbolically. They address and resolve conflicts and confusion, which the audience experiences either consciously or unconsciously (Solomon, 1983).

There were examples of strong, well-informed studies that contributed a body of theoretical knowledge, and there were also examples of why we need to work harder when examining mediated artifacts. Moreover, there are no studies that take on political films as a genre to uncover their effect on audiences. This study fills that breach in rhetorical scholarship.

Procedure and Method

Because values and value premises are often the key elements in persuasion and influence, I will turn the lens toward rhetorical criticism on the values I find prominent in political films. In this study, I will critique the films *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The*

Candidate (1972), *The Contender* (2000), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Power* (1986), and *Primary Colors* (1998) and record the emergent values as they are depicted. These values will help us to understand the specific values Americans considered important when contemplating the role of political matters in their lives.

In order to conduct this study I use what Campbell (1972) describes as the organic approach to rhetorical criticism. This approach allows the researcher to look within the artifacts, in this case film, and analyze themes and categories that emerge as the study progresses. This approach is in contrast to the prescriptive approach, which requires the critic to apply external categories, or preconceived themes to the artifact before beginning the study.

As I view these films, I will critically examine the emergent value themes in the films and follow a perspective similar to that of Steele and Redding (1962) who studied the cultural values that serve as persuasive premises in political rhetoric. They found that white Americans value the Puritan, pioneer morality and act in terms of right and wrong, and good and bad. Americans also value the individual, success, progress, equality, effort and optimism, efficiency, rejection of authority, rationality, sociality, material comfort, quantification, conformity, humor, generosity, and patriotism. The authors described each of these values in immense detail and through this study; they concluded that cultural values supply many of the major premises used in persuasive speaking to gain audience approval.

Once I have critically examined the value premises present in these films, I list and describe them discussing their prominence within the films and the priority they are given. Through this method, I determine how values are used and how they aid in the persuasive potential of films, if they reflect American values, and what are the social implications of those values.

Precedence of Value Studies

Scholars and politicians alike have placed a great deal of importance on values. Rokeach (1973) maintains that values are a core concept in any of the social sciences moreover; he states that any problem to be solved in social science can be linked to the importance of human values. Rokeach goes on to say that in order for a value study to be rewarding the following criteria must be satisfied. Any value concept should be naturally appealing and easily definable. Value concepts need to be clearly discernible from other concepts and definitions. Concepts need to be stated in clear direct language, avoiding “should” and “ought.” He concludes that all value studies need to take a value free approach, or in other words, the researcher needs to keep his or her own values out of the study.

Rokeach (1973) posits that once the criteria are set, five assumptions about the nature of human values need to be observed. First, people possess a small number of total values. Next, all people possess the same values, but to varying degrees. Third, values are organized into a value system. Then human values can be traced to culture, society, institutions and personality. Finally, values, value premises, and value systems affect everyone and are therefore, worth studying.

Values have become a hot button topic in political campaigning recently. Cherny (2004) discussed the prominent role values played in the 2004 Presidential election. Early in 2004 George W. Bush declared, "the defense of marriage requires a constitutional amendment." In response, John Kerry, the democratic nominee, avowed that marriage did need attention but it was not due to the threat of gay marriage, but the strain put on married couples daily. This was Kerry's attempt to redefine family values from a democratic perspective. His efforts fell short

and according to exit polls, Bush's version of family values carried more weight in the swing states, which led him to a second term in office (Cherny, 2004).

Value judgment in political speeches has proven to be an important area of study as well. Scheele (1984) demonstrated the importance of value judgment in political artifacts when he analyzed the values that framed Reagan's 1980 acceptance address. He found that Reagan repeatedly employed family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom in his speech. He referred to these values as an integral part of his own values system and declared that the United States needed to adopt these values and expunge the negative values brought forth by the Carter administration. Reagan revealed his own personal values and allowed Americans to envision a simpler, more peaceful country through the illustration of the values described in his speech.

The following section will highlight articles that focused on American values in popular artifacts and provide a foundation for studying values in these artifacts. They also exemplify the importance of a values study.

Values Judgment

Olsen (1983) studied American values as presented in Franklin D. Roosevelt's *Four Freedom's Speech* from his 1941 Message to Congress. The four freedoms, as Roosevelt describes them are, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Fear, and Freedom from Want. These freedoms represented four basic values that Americans treasure.

The purpose of the speech was to gain American support for World War II. Roosevelt was wildly successful because of his brilliant use of basic American values and the need to protect those values even if force is necessary. After this speech, the Four Freedoms became a common theme in all of Roosevelt's speeches (Olsen, 1983).

Norman Rockwell, best known for his portraits of American life and the American dream, chose to illustrate the Four Freedoms as Roosevelt described. Rather than depict policy, Rockwell chose to praise political and religious values in his portraits published by *The Saturday Evening Post*. The portraits became so popular they were made into posters and mass-produced. They were distributed by the government and through private agencies. These posters allowed Americans to readily identify with the poster's theme (political policy), because it mirrored their way of living (Olsen, 1983).

Many Americans may not have been able to completely relate to Roosevelt's call to action, but they could easily relate to the values as illustrated by Rockwell. His illustrations provide evidence that icons, which represent basic American ways of living can, in fact, motivate people to political action. In this case, it motivated the American people to support the war effort as directed by President Roosevelt (Olsen, 1983).

Brown (1976) posited the theory that television programming of the 1970s conveyed oppositional messages. Much of the programming of the time advertised a very clear motif that positioned itself as a representation of the American way of life, however; their underlying themes voided their overt intentions.

Brown (1976) analyzed value shows such as *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*, as both positioned themselves as programs with a strong moral message, and vast audience appeal. However, the audience it appealed to was middle class and suburban. Not only did these shows not appeal to urban audiences, it offended these audiences. An episode of *The Waltons* overtly admitted that the big city was to blame for one of the kinfolk's fall into marital separation and crime. The only cure for his predicament was to move home to the morality of the mountain. This may very well have been true for this person, but moving home and into the

holds of a loving family is not an alternative for most urban dwellers. This becomes a covert theme that nullifies the overt theme of audience representation through common American values (Brown, 1976).

Makay (1994) analyzed Lee Iacocca's use of value appeals in his Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission speeches. Iacocca spoke of his love for his country and everything that makes America great. This love was illustrated through his use of value appeals. The purpose of his speeches was to thank the public for their monetary donations for the renovation of The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Through his vivid description and imagery he helped Americans to understand that they were not just replacing nuts, bolts, and buffing sheets of copper; they were restoring the American Dream. Through his careful use of the interrelated word pairs, hard work/better life, liberty/opportunity, sacrifice/suffering, and competition/success, he painted a picture of what the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island meant to his immigrant parents and all of the families that came to the new world looking for a better life, for themselves and their families. Iacocca was a product and a legacy of the American Dream. The son of middle class immigrant parents; he brought the Chrysler Corporation out of dire straits and made it a valuable company, and he was able to give back to the land he loved. These value appeals proved to be effective, because the commission was successful. Americans respond to values that correspond to the American Dream (Makay, 1994).

Social Value Model of Rhetorical Criticism

Rushing and Frenz (1978) developed a model to investigate the use of values in film. They found it necessary to develop a more clearly defined manner of analyzing films because of the potent vehicle for socio-political change film had become. Film illustrates the values of the

culture in which it was created; therefore a sophisticated means of studying film was imperative. They called this model, the Social Value Model.

The Rushing and Frenzt (1978) model is a five-part model that functions to reveal the nature of the political context that is pervasive in film. The first part to the model is *dialectical opposition*. A culture's basic values, as portrayed in film, typically exist in a fragile state of tension. This tension usually falls on a continuum of degree between good and bad in some form.

The second part of the Social Value Model is *symbolic conflict*. Because the values exist in a state of tension, conflict between the values is inevitable. This conflict can occur in the form of good versus evil, and this conflict can be a powerful catalyst to enact social change within the film, which also has the power to create a change in the audience (Rushing and Frenzt, 1978).

The next part of the model is *patterns of change*. This part of the model builds on the foundation provided by the previous part, *symbolic conflict*. Once the conflict occurs, one of two things will occur: dialectical transformation or dialectical synthesis. Dialectical transformation is the easier road to take, because the change that occurs is just a shift from one set of established values to another set of established values. In film, this would play out when good wins over evil or vice versa. The more complicated option is the dialectical synthesis. When this occurs a new value system must be created. As the conflict between the values occurs, one does not win over the other. They, however, integrate into a new system of values. This reflects real life more than dialectical transformation, because the transformation assumes that we believe in absolutes with very little flexibility in our morality or our value system. The synthesis is more realistic in that it allows for flexibility in our beliefs. There can be elements of both conflicting values in the new value system (Rushing and Frenzt, 1978).

Psychological prerequisites are the next part of the Social Value Model. This part assumes that in order for a value change to occur, regardless of form, we must have experienced and understood the new value system at a psychological level. Without a cognitive understanding of the value, it cannot be adopted or integrated into the culture, or the context of the film (Rushing and Frenz, 1978).

The final component to the Social Value Model is the *Audience*. The audience becomes the spectators of the social change occurring on film. Without an audience to witness the social change, and all of the elements necessary for the social change to take place, it need not have taken place at all. The audience is the binding of this rhetorical model.

The Social Value Model for was designed for the rhetorical criticism of popular mass media artifacts (Rushing, 1983). However, it was originally intended to analyze the dialectical opposition between moralism and materialism, both basic myths within the American Dream in the film *Rocky* (1976). Rushing used the model she developed and extended it further and examined individualism and community within the myth of the western film genre. Using this opposing dialectic, Rushing (1983) studied the American Western Myth with a rhetorical lens and found that films can reflect a mood or style as well as start a trend through the depiction of social values.

In the late 1970s John Travolta did the Hustle with his famous white suit and perfectly groomed hair in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). A few years later, in *Urban Cowboy* (1980) he hung up his disco duds for a Stetson hat and a mechanical bull. This shift was powerful and many Americans jumped on that cowboy bandwagon. College students embraced country music at this time. Dance halls that once donned a disco ball and a tiled floor that lit up, now advertises its mechanical bull, Gilly's style.

Politically, Americans elected a President who has been described as a cowboy in 1980. The primetime soap *Dallas* was the top television show of the time. The western myth and the new drug store cowboy trend of the eighties was partly due to the latest entertainment trends that had a persuasive, or rhetorical effect on our society (Rushing, 1983). This shift was evidence of the powerful nature of old fashioned American values as they are portrayed in western films.

The aforementioned studies provide a solid foundation for the study of film and the values illustrated within those contexts. They also provide evidence that social values are an important and worthwhile area of study. The values depicted in film mirror the values of the culture in which it was created and help construct the political attitudes of the audience. Political films provide the artifact for a rhetorical study of the suatory connection between the images and ideas projected on screen and key American values. Once completed, this dissertation will make an important contribution to both the literature on the rhetoric of film, and our knowledge about political rhetoric as reflected in messages of popular culture, and in this case, film.

The procedure I used to study these films follows a simple formula. For the first viewing of each film I did not take notes and I kept an open mind looking for potential themes and connections. When I viewed the films for a second time, I took notes and carefully recorded interesting themes and political associations. The next step is to watch each film and look specifically for elements that would help in answering question one, and then a separate viewing for question two, and again another viewing for question three. This is an important step because it allows the researcher to keep the answers to the questions in the proper context. One more viewing of each film is necessary to tie the questions together and connect the chapters smoothly. Most of the films in this study had a DVD commentary and special features available. Watching

the extra features can provide insight into the impact the film may have had and also what the filmmakers may have intended the film to accomplish.

Organization of Study

Chapter One of this study consists of the present introduction. This chapter introduces the topic of study, provides the rationale for the study, lists the research questions, and details the procedure and method. This introduction lays the foundation and provides the justification for the project. Chapter Two will answer the first research question: How do political films function rhetorically in an effort to reach their persuasive potential? Chapter Three will answer the second research question: How do political films reflect the political consciousness of society through the depiction of American values? Chapter Four will answer the final research question: What are the social implications of that consciousness as demonstrated through the execution of political campaigns and the actions of politicians? The final chapter will be a summation and conclusion of the proposed dissertation. This organization is tentative and most likely will change as themes emerge and findings are evident.

CHAPTER TWO

Rhetorical Functions of Political Films

Film has the potential to create shared meanings, and construct a reality for a community like no other medium can (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1991). For instance, Solomon (1976) and Rushing (1983) studied the Western film genre and the myth of the western, and their work adds to our vision of how humans interacted then. Even if we have not seen a western recently, films help us to imagine the same dusty, gloomy, popup town on the edge of the wilderness. Indeed we are influenced by film because they function rhetorically. Something that is rhetorical in nature and becomes meaningful discourse used to create knowledge for mutual understanding, or functions persuasively, can be considered as rhetoric (Makay, 1980). These films helped the audience share a mutual understanding of the old west.

Films selected for this study function rhetorically to reach a persuasive potential through an interpretation of day to day political operations and events. In each film a politician or a variety of politicians are trying to win an election, stay in office, or bring about societal change, which requires input and approval from their constituents. Each character at some point had to attempt to gain that approval and each used cultural value premises to paint a picture that illustrated some version of the American dream. In this chapter I will answer the question: How do political films function rhetorically, through the interpretation of political events, to reach their persuasive potential? In order to answer this question, I will discuss each film in the following order: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000). In each section I will describe and interpret the plotlines using a rhetorical lens and explain the political understanding created by the film and thus, taken away by the audience.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)

Integrity can be defined in several ways; honor, honesty, veracity, and the list continues. It is usually a key value highlighted or strategically omitted in political films. Likewise, dishonor is also a strong theme found in political films. We always witness the corrupt politician who resides in the back pocket of large corporations, or who has obvious motives that transcend the constituency he or she is sworn to serve.

In the film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), Jefferson Smith is a man of the highest integrity with no political ambitions or aspirations. In fact, he is a troop leader for an organization similar to that of our Boy Scouts called the Boy Rangers. His rangers love and admire his knowledge of American history, love of nature, and respect for government. They deem him the “greatest American.”

When Senior Senator Foley died, the political power-seekers within Mr. Smith’s state were in a frenzy to find a suitable replacement. They had a certain type of person in mind, someone who could be easily manipulated, and persuaded, with little mind of his own. After looking through the options, one of the governor’s children suggests Jefferson Smith, much to the delight of the other children at the dinner table. The children cheer at the thought of Mr. Smith going to Washington. After much persuasion, Mr. Smith’s name is thrown into the ring.

After consideration, the advisors decide Smith would be a fantastic replacement, because he knows so very little about politics, and appears to be a simpleton who can be easily manipulated. They want a trained seal who will not speak out of turn, and they see the opportunity to put a puppet into office so they take advantage of it.

Mr. Smith’s arrival in Washington is eventful. Much to his colleagues’ irritation, he immediately takes a tour of the museums and monuments that make the city the center for

American history. He seeks out inspiration from the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the mere sight of the Capitol dome elevates his political aspirations far beyond his wildest dreams.

Smith is pleasantly overwhelmed with his new responsibility, and he wants to do his very best to please his Statesmen. In his acceptance speech he is humbled, in fact he says that all of this must be a mistake. Senator Paine is the other Senator from Smith's state, and Smith was honored to be in his great company. He has idolized Paine for many years and had heard many stories from his late father, who was close friends with Paine. Smith feels he is in good hands.

Smith's contribution to the country is a bill to create a boy's camp near Willett Creek, his hometown. Paine and company have already drafted and submitted a bill that would dam the creek making it unavailable for camping, especially for a boy' camp. Oblivious to the existence of this bill, Smith forges ahead and introduces his bill.

After the introduction of Smith's bill, Paine and his colleagues learn quickly that Smith has strong convictions and could not be manipulated. The only option at this point would be to expel him from the senate. In order to do this, Paine along with his corporate friends fabricated documents that would implicate Smith in a land deal scandal. They created land contracts with forged signatures in an attempt to persuade Congress that Smith had purchased the land surrounding Willett Creek shortly before leaving for Washington, and would benefit financially from any activity on the land.

Knowing very little about Smith, Congress becomes enraged over such abhorrent behavior. A disillusioned and defeated Smith leaves for his place of solace and inspiration, the Lincoln Memorial. Saunders, his Congressional assistant, had quit days earlier because of her growing bitterness and disgust toward the treatment of Smith, manages to find him. She teaches

him how to fight the fraudulent charges and forge ahead successfully. Her actions are driven by her growing love and affection for Smith.

Smith orchestrates a twenty-four hour filibuster with Saunder's assistance. He reads the Constitution to his fellow Congressmen as well as books on government in an attempt to wear them down and clear his good name. The members of Congress are not pleased with his actions but have to stay. The President of the Senate seems taken with Smith's boyish charm and idealism. Throughout the filibuster he seems proud of Smith's convictions and need to clear his name. He is a refreshing character, and the only one of the good old boy characters who has redeeming qualities. He gave us a glimmer of hope that good may prevail.

Smith finally collapses from exhaustion, which turns events quickly. His dedication to his cause forces Congress to examine their crooked ways. Paine, the most corrupt of all the characters, admits to falsifying charges against Smith and admits that he was once idealistic with good character and integrity too, but had lost his way years earlier.

Interestingly, during the filibuster, there was a great struggle between good and evil happening far behind the scenes. The newspapers, owned by the man lining the political pockets, are reporting the fraudulent charges with salacious detail. Smith's constituents are absolutely livid with the alleged charges. Meanwhile, Smith printed his own paper about the Boy Rangers before he left for Washington. Smith's allies are able to get the paper up and running and the stories printed. Boy Rangers all across Smith's state delivered papers promoting the truth about Jefferson Smith.

In this film, integrity and dishonor fight a bloody battle. Integrity and the fight for integrity was the central theme that could not be weakened. When many would hang their heads in defeat and move on, Smith fought to clear his name in a battle that seemed futile. The value

premises that are the strongest in this film are American history, love of nature, and respect for government, in addition to integrity.

This film functions rhetorically to allow the audience to witness the grueling, exhaustive exoneration process and see that a determined elected official can be just as unrelenting as his opponents. Indeed we may watch this film with a heavy heart hoping that good will and honesty will win over evil in the end. Many today may view this film and see it as a nice, old fashioned film. It has a happy ending and we know who the good guys are and we know who the bad guys are. It is a cultural product of its time. Often, films today do not have such a clear cut ending, nor is that ending happy. Sixty-six years ago, however, audiences did not view this film with the same nostalgia in fact, Keyishian (2003) noted that many Senators found *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) to be too revealing and offensive. In fact, Ambassador Joseph Kennedy unsuccessfully attempted to have the film banned in Europe. This anecdote alone suggests that films do have rhetorical potential and perhaps even repercussions far beyond the scope of entertainment.

The Candidate (1972)

The Candidate (1972) parallels *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) on several levels. The protagonists in both films are idealistic men who want to make the world a better place. The candidate in this film is Bill McKay, is a liberal lawyer championing for better health care, women's rights, the environment, and welfare. He hesitantly agrees to run for senate after a political operative encourages him. McKay is adamant that he is running on principle alone and without the help of his father, former governor John J. McKay. His father, a good old boy, was wrought with corruption and known for crooked dealings.

Slowly but surely, McKay is encouraged to skirt the issues, give vague answers to penetrating questions, and fall to the campaign tricks he wanted so terribly to avoid. He wants to repudiate his father's political trappings and win on his own merit. There are two moments in the movie that define McKay's rise to success and fall from integrity. His rise to success occurs after a debate with the incumbent opponent, he was chastised for getting too far off message. However, for once he was able to speak freely for a moment about his real concerns for the people of California. His fall from integrity occurs after his father brokers a deal with the Teamsters. The candidate despises the organization because of their lack of support for farm workers, yet he allows his father to broker the deal in order to gain their support.

The interesting twist in the film is his unexpected win against incumbent Crocker Jarmon. Regardless of McKay's occasional truthful admissions, and despite the political operations beyond his control, he won the election. However, he did not win because of his occasional show of convictions or lack of convictions. He won because of his youthful looks and personal viability.

This development is very revealing. Throughout the entire film the audience is concerned with McKay's integrity. We wanted his good to win over his advisor's corruption. The viewer never considers the integrity of the voter, and McKay's platform did not matter. His campaign was going to have him win because he was the attractive choice, a pretty face expressing ambiguous political themes.

By the end of the film, McKay has lost his way and after his win asks his primary consultant, Marvin Lucas played by Peter Boyle, "what do we do now?" When he announced his candidacy, McKay was abounding with ideas and opportunities to make the world a better place. The nature of the political machine drained him of his moral, honorable convictions.

The Candidate (1972), similar to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), had many battles of good versus evil and integrity versus dishonor. The integrity of McKay often shined through the mechanics of the campaign, but it was dramatically diminished with the dishonorable implementation of political routines. The value premises most prevalent in this film are grounded in the honor and integrity within McKay. He fought for his voice to be heard over the political jargon and was successful on occasion, but the political trappings won in the end. The audience is left with the hope that after the election his original intentions will be realized. The rhetoric of this film also seeks to have audiences understand the political manipulation.

As the audience views this film, we want to see McKay's convictions shine through the political machine and we are encouraged when they do. However, this does not happen as often as we would hope. When the movie ends and we know that McKay has lost his way, we may walk away and suspect many of our own leaders fall into this trap. Audiences may question the authenticity of our Senators and Representatives. How many advisors do they have, do they have convictions that would shine through if only someone would let them? This film creates a shared reality for the audience that is not nearly as optimistic as that of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

Power (1986)

In *Power* (1986) Richard Gere plays a slick, suave political consultant named Pete St. John. St. John is known for getting his clients elected at all cost. He does not care about political affiliation; he only cares about their ability to pay. One of his clients says that St. John is only loyal to money. This film is timely because major campaigns are always guided in part by consultants (Trent and Friedenber, 2004).

The first scene in the film depicts a very serious terrorist bombing in a South American country with serious injuries and emotion. The audience quickly learns that St. John plans to capitalize on this tragic event to prove a point and evoke sympathy among voters. After the dust settles and the shock of the bombing wears off, St. John tells his client to wear the blood stained shirt in every campaign speech to profit from the bombing. During this scene the audience is lead to believe that this bombing could have taken place at anytime during the campaign and it was a serious threat. Instead of allowing the country to heal from this event, St. John uses it to help his client win the election and the bloody shirt is a reminder to the voters that a regime change is necessary to instill social order in the country. This interpretation of events suggests that good needs to win over evil, but at whatever cost necessary.

St. John has several clients in the film. The next client shown is an elderly man, Wallace Furman, running for governor of New Mexico. He is originally from New York City, which is just one of many obstacles to overcome. The first time the audience sees this man is through the eyes of St. John. The man is boring and soft spoken and St. John is hoping for at least 39% of the vote, which more than likely will not win the election, but it would be a victory in this particular case.

St. John tells Furman that he needs to overhaul his life in order to have any chance of winning. Furman is too pale to win in New Mexico and St. John suggests that he visit a tanning bed, regardless of Furman's family history of skin cancer. He tells Furman to change his wardrobe and wear warmer colors to match the New Mexico color scheme. The rhetoric favors cosmetics over substance.

Now that the superficial image has been addressed, St. Johns addresses the political image. Furman needs to personify new ideas, new directions, change, and vigor. Furman wants

to win on his merit, but St. John tells him that once he is elected he can do whatever he wants, but until then St. John makes the decisions. The important themes that are evident in this scene are vigor, change, new directions, and image. St. John tries to make Furman a new man, and more importantly a viable candidate through the personification of these premises. St. John also makes it clear that he can get Furman elected, after that Wallace can do whatever he wants to lead the state of New Mexico.

Even though it is early in the film, the audience understands that St. John is shallow and greedy. He lives a fast, flashy lifestyle and money is his best friend. We are surprised to find that St. John does have a soft spot for one of his clients. Senator Sam Hastings is a client from Ohio who St. John has worked with for many years and they have become close friends.

St. John meets with Hastings and is informed that he is ill and will not be seeking another term in office. The audience expects St. John to be upset over the loss of a client but instead he is devastated because his friend is ill. He sets up a press conference to make this announcement and before the press is alerted St. John is contacted by Arnold Billing. Billing, a public relations expert, is employed by a wealthy Middle Eastern oil producer who is interested in politics. Billing is aware of St. John's skills and he wants St. John to take on Jerome Cade as a client; St. John accepts hesitantly.

Out of all of the plotlines present in this film, this one is the most prominent. Each of the other stories and characters are supporting plots that help to illustrate the type of person St. John is, and how he operates. This plotline contains the scandal that frames the film. Early on, the audience does not know exactly how the scandal is going to play out, or if it will at all but we are suspicious. The audience is not the only suspicious party however. St. John's ex-wife, Sydney, is still a part of his life. She is a journalist and she smells a story. The audience is privy to the

fact that Arab oil is somehow related to Cade and Billing, but we are not sure how it will play yet. We know that Billing jumped on the Hastings retirement and that also reeks of foul play.

As the story unfolds the audience learns through Sydney's investigation that Senator Hastings' wife, Claire, has gotten over her head in debt. She obtained several loans from a mysterious Arab oil company and if found out it would cause trouble for her husband. Senator Hastings is known for his environmentally friendly stance against the use of oil for energy.

As the Senator's wife digs herself further and further into debt, her husband's political career is in jeopardy. The oil company is threatening to expose him if he does not quit politics. The vacancy leaves an opening for a pro-oil candidate, funded by the oil company, to jump in and take his place, Jerome Cade. Cade is funded by the oil company, which was represented by Billing. Hastings was promoting solar energy and conservation throughout his career and Cade was overtly against it. Despite their differences Hastings still endorsed Cade, which eventually helps to expose the scandal.

Sydney chooses to keep the story to herself, therefore, it never reaches Hastings' constituency. St. John however, knows the story and this leaves him feeling betrayed, disillusioned and unhappy with the manipulation of contemporary political campaigns. He drops Cade as a client and works to get a young college professor, Aarons, elected. St. John tells the professor to speak from his heart and stop deceptive campaigning. While Aarons may have won the hearts and minds of many people he came in a close second leaving Cade a distant third. Aarons' did not win the election but it was moral victory for both him and St. John, with his new ethical position.

While this storyline was playing out, other candidates were campaigning. The audience saw St. John's manipulation in each of the candidate's campaigns. Furman was attacked on the

carpet bagging issue and St. John's rebuttal was to shoot an ad showing Furman on a horse with a cavalry behind him, creating messages that suggest that he could have moved anywhere in the world but he chose New Mexico, and he wants to help the people of the state. Furman does, however, end up losing the election in the end. St. John also has a client running for re-election for the state of Washington, Andrea Stannard. The audience, again, sees St. John stage public arguments bringing important issues to light, but in a shady political manner. Stannard does win her re-election bid.

The value premises present in these scenes are complicated and emerge from the wreckage of dishonor, manipulation, and trickery. However, once they emerge they shine through brilliantly. St. John learns that his "win at all cost" attitude is hurtful and crude. When he discovers the oil scandal and his friend's involvement he becomes saddened by the process and truth, respect, trust, honor, and progress become more important than winning. Aarons' second place finish becomes the most significant win of the election because integrity won over dishonor and pageantry.

Similar to *The Candidate* (1972), the audience walks away with an understanding of how power, questionable ethics and technology aids the political process. Audiences may leave this film wondering how much puppetry is involved in the campaigns of our candidates. However, *Power* (1986) may leave the audience feeling slightly more optimistic than those who saw *The Candidate* (1972) because St. John tries to be honorable in the end. I, however, see what one often refers to as a "Hollywood ending" for this film because St. John suddenly wants to right the wrongs he created in his past manipulations. He also made progress toward the end of the film. So he helped the man with the most integrity beat the man with the least integrity. Of course, he did not win overall but it was a moral victory and the lesson of the film.

Primary Colors (1998)

This film is loosely based on Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential election campaign and eventual victory. The story is told through the eyes of a reluctant campaign consultant, Henry Burton. This film employs a combination of down home southern charm and political manipulation; which when combined leads to a win in the end. Throughout this film the audience sees a charismatic candidate who genuinely cares about people. The candidate will blatantly lie to sell his point to voters. Early in the film the audience sees Jack Stanton, played by John Travolta, listening very empathetically to an adult literacy support group. As Stanton wipes away tears, he tells the story of his uncle Charlie who won a medal of honor for courage in World War II, but did not have the courage to learn how to read.

Burton is looking for a candidate to work for who cares about the people he/she wants to serve, and he is torn because Stanton's way is unorthodox and at times dishonest. However, Burton knows that Stanton has the people's best interests at heart. This film is wrought with a lot of inner struggle. It has scandals involving, sex, drugs, crime, and death, but scandalous activity is necessary to tell an intriguing story of how a bright and politically skilled country boy can become President.

There are two scenes that depict and interpret important value premises. First, Libby, played by Kathy Bates, is referred to as the "dust buster." She cleans up all of the messes that Stanton creates. She has a good heart but a weak mind. In the film they say she has TB, true believerism. When her candidate turns out to be less than honorable she has a mental breakdown. Throughout this campaign she is feeling stronger, and Stanton is an old friend from years ago. She loves and trusts him and knows that he has a strong heart and at the very worst, does the wrong thing for the right reasons. Toward the end of the film, Stanton's strongest opponent

suffers a heart attack and is replaced by a former Florida Governor, Fred Picker played by Larry Hagman. Picker quit politics twenty years earlier for personal reasons involving his family. His reasons were vague and this piqued curiosity in the Stanton camp. There are rumors of perhaps a land scandal, but they thought there could be more. Libby and Burton went to investigate, acting as a member of Picker's campaign. They find much more than a land scandal. While in office, Picker became addicted to cocaine. He felt invincible and made many mistakes including a homosexual affair. His dealer became his lover and fast forward twenty years, his lover has AIDS and is dying in a Miami area halfway house.

This story is made of what tabloids can only dream of, and the Stanton's now have more ammunition than they ever wanted. Libby and Burton decide to test the Stanton's character. They never fight dirty or went negative, and they wanted to win on merit only. With such an ace in the hole, Burton and Libby could see just how honorable the Stanton's are. Without hesitation, the Stanton's discussed the best way to leak the story. Libby tries to change their mind by blackmailing them. In her mind though, it is over. They have failed her test and ultimately, failed her.

Libby Holden commits suicide. The people she believed in most betrayed her trust and made her question everything she ever knew about winning a good fight. In light of this event, Stanton eventually does the right thing. Instead of leaking the information he gives the file with all of the information to Picker and he could choose what to do from there. At this point, Burton tries to quit the campaign. He wanted to fight for a candidate who would win on merit alone, and even though Stanton does the right thing eventually, he only does it because of Libby.

In the following scene Stanton convinces Burton to stay. He explains that he would have leaked the information about Picker to the press and felt badly about it after he did it, but it

would have been the right thing to do. He knew that Picker would have won the nomination and taken the party down with him as soon as the press found about the scandal. He knew that it would have been the wrong thing for the right reasons. He explained that it is the price you pay to lead. He went on to say that Lincoln was a whore before he was President, doing whatever he could to get to the point where he could change the country for the better. Therefore, Stanton had to do whatever it took to win “the opportunity to stand before the nation and appeal to the better angels of our nature.”

He convinced Burton to stay because Burton knew that Stanton was the candidate who cared about the people of the country who needed cared about the most. His decision paid off because Stanton won and had the opportunity to make the most of the office and lead the country to a better place.

This film is particularly interesting because John Travolta presents Jack Stanton with the voice and manner of Bill Clinton. Before the film was released the producers were adamant that this film was not portraying any part of Clinton’s life (Perlmutter, 1999). The only people who can believe this are those who have not yet seen the film. As the audience walks away from this film, the rhetorical potential is enormous. The audience may believe that this is how Clinton’s campaign worked. The scandals that were proven false, the manipulations, and trickery leave the audience dissonant. Clinton supporters agree that he did every thing with the voters’ best interest at heart, and his opponents use it to fuel a fire that started many years ago.

There are a variety of meanings one can take away from this film, however it cannot be argued that regardless of what side of the aisle one resides on, this film paints a real life picture of man who lead this country for two terms. The film was based on the best selling novel of the same name. This book caused a great deal of controversy in 1996 when it was first released, and

one of the primary reasons was its author who was Anonymous. Later, *Newsweek* columnist Joe Klein revealed himself to be the author. The book was a huge hit and prompted the film *Primary Colors* (1998) to be made.

Many viewers may have changed their mind about Clinton after watching this film for better or worse, but regardless this film was sure to have an impact on the audience. We were able to see a version of Clinton we had not seen. We could believe that the film was fictitious and take some parts and leave others.

Wag the Dog (1997)

Wag the Dog (1997) is interesting because it does not reflect or interpret any redeeming qualities in politics. The film allows the audience access to the sinister, manipulative side of political operations. This film is best known for its ability to not only reflect real life events, but actually predict them.

The basic plot line of the film centers around alleged sexual misconduct between the President and a Fire Fly Girl. In order to detract attention away from these allegations so close to an election, a special team of operatives fabricate a war. They follow the premise that if it is on television it is true.

In order to pull off such a stunt, the operatives hire Hollywood producer Stanley Motss (pronounced Moss, the t is silent), played by Dustin Hoffman. With help from Hollywood, anything seems possible and as it turns out, it is. Throughout this film an audience member starts to question the morality of anything we see our leaders do. This assertion rings true because as this story plays out we see a President get into some hot water and then completely sidestep the allegations due to a fabricated war.

Robert De Niro plays Conrad Brean, a spinmaster for the administration. After he learns about the sexual misconduct allegations he knows without hesitation that the media is going to help distract America away from these allegations. He knows that if we see it on television it becomes reality. To get the rest of his team in the right frame of mind he starts talking about the B3 Bomber, which does not exist. Someone says that there is no such thing as the B3 Bomber. Brean responds that there has to be, he heard it on television. He wanted to prove his point that anything is possible if it is on television.

Once they involve Stanley Motss, the Hollywood producer, the show really begins to roll. Motss brings in song writers, consultants, and productions experts to help the President avoid facing the sexual misconduct allegations. Brean decides that they are going to war with Albania, primarily because no one really knows anything about the country.

The first piece of tape they leak to the press is a manufactured scene using a teenage girl running from her bomb-ridden village with her cat. We watch the production of this shot so we as the audience see a girl dressed in authentic Albanian garb running scared with a bag of potato chips as a prop. After the scene is shot we watch them digitally enhance the scene. They add a burning building, a fiery bridge, and place a cat in her arms. This shot gets leaked to every press agency in the America, and all of a sudden, we are at war.

Craig T. Nelson plays the President's opponent in the election, Senator John Neal. He knows the political ropes and ends the war prematurely. Motss is very enthusiastic about this production and he thinks that act one just ended and it is time to produce act two. For this act they decide to tell America that there is a soldier trapped behind enemy lines. He is a prisoner and being held against his will. They produce a song reminiscent of *We are the World* to bring this soldier home. They write an old sounding song about an old shoe and make people believe

that it is really an old folk song. In order to fit the song they want a man who is somehow affiliated with the government with Shoe is in name. They find William Schumann who is affiliated with the special services of the government. Unfortunately, he is a prisoner with a serious mental illness incarcerated because he raped a nun. They found the worst possible person to play a war hero, but they had to continue with him because the story was already in motion.

Before that becomes an issue, they spread the word about Schumann and his plight in Albania. They threw old shoes in trees and everyone sang the old shoe song. They wanted to manufacture a scene where he is sent home and the President greets him and gives him a medal. Unfortunately, after a plane carrying Schumann, Motss, and Brean crashes in the middle of a field Schumann escaped and tried to rape a farm girl. The father of the farm girl shoots and kills Schumann and now they are left with a dead war hero. Motss does not miss a beat. Instead of a welcome home for Schumann they stage a military burial with all of the honors a military hero deserves.

Motss is extremely proud of his production and would casually mention the ways in which people would talk about this in the years to come. Brean has repeatedly warned him that no one would ever know about this. Motss does not let this go and Brean eventually had him killed. The final scene shows the audience Motss' funeral and a reporter talking about the heart attack that caused his death.

This is a political satire of epic proportions. The audience watches the Executive Branch of government completely fabricate a war and go to great lengths to do it and completely pull it off. The audience leaves this film wondering if this could be true, if a President could

completely distract a country by fabricating a war? Brean stated that everyone believed the Gulf War happened because he produced the shot of the Smart Bomb through the chimney.

This film has enormous rhetorical potential because it poses the question for the audience about whether politics would go as far as the characters in the movie have taken it. The implicit invitation to the audience is to watch media critically and question the motives for war conscientiously. The film functions rhetorically by creating a shared reality of mistrust and fostering a mutual understanding of a necessity for critical analysis of all of our leader's choices.

The Contender (2000)

In this film, Laine Hanson (Joan Allen) is a democratic Senator from the state of Ohio. She had small controversy surrounding her career due to a party change before her most recent election. As the daughter of a Republican governor, she was expected to proceed throughout her career on the right side of the aisle. As the party continued to move further and further to the right, she controversially moved to the left side of the aisle. She was looked at as a trader with no party loyalty and she could not be trusted.

When the Vice President dies unexpectedly, President Jackson Evans (Jeff Bridges) is in dire need of a replacement. As Evans moves toward the end of his second term he is also looking for a legacy or a swan song, as they call it. He decides to ensure a positive political legacy by nominating a woman for Vice President.

The nomination of Hanson for this position in the Executive Branch of the government is met with great dissonance. Sheldon Runyon (Gary Oldman), still bitter over his loss to Evans in the Presidential election is determined to shoot down Hanson's nomination by creating such a pit of controversy one could not possibly dig them self out, let alone survive it politically.

Runyon puts a violent spin on an already dangerous college practice from Hanson's past. Hanson desperately wanted to join a sorority in college, however the hazing and initiation rituals would have required her to perform myriad sexual acts with several fraternity boys. Hanson entertained this idea after having a couple of drinks, and thought that it was only fair that if boys had to do it, then why not girls. She eventually thought better of it. Unfortunately, many started a rumor that the blue blooded governor's daughter did in fact participate in the ritual, a difficult bell to un-ring as she explained it. The rumors created enough fodder for Runyon to find "witnesses" and doctored photographs of her in various sex acts with several fraternity boys. Hanson is expected to explain her behavior as well as her liberal views to a confirmation committee during a public hearing. She is dignified and honest, and only responds to those inquiries that were political and not personal.

Butler (1997) states that we assign agency to language. This means that words have the power to injure and words along with the sticks and stones may break our bones, so to speak. We are constantly vulnerable to language everyday of our life. "Injurious speech raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable, and explicit" (Butler, 1997). Whether a speech act is illocutionary (do what they say, as they are said) or perlocutionary (lead to effects of what is said), the moment of the act is a "condensed historicity." It goes beyond itself in past and future patterns and directions and is created and recreated through repetition. However, Butler (1997) continues, language by virtue, must be recognized in order to exist. This assertion is the key to understanding the promise of *The Contender* (2000).

The overarching theme weaved into and throughout this film is the notion that Hanson is a woman, therefore she does not have the "potential for greatness." Since this notion is clearly

nonsense, the opposing forces must create doubt by nosing in her past and giving the appearance of finding unbelievable grist for the controversy mill, with testimony and photos that put her in the middle of a “gang bang” twenty years earlier.

Much to her supporter’s dismay, Hanson refuses to dignify any allegations of personal impropriety with a response. She takes on political questioning with grace, including attacks about being pro-choice (which is referred to as a propensity for murder by Runyon). Hanson learns that Runyon’s wife received an abortion several years earlier, but she maintains that what is private is private regardless of the attacks. Hanson sustains overt and subtle violence including: groovy chick, sexual deviant, gut the bitch in the belly, cancer of rigorous decay, and baby killer, not to mention have the label “woman” in front of every title.

Injustice and inequality are portrayed so realistically in this film, and the lack of response on Hanson’s part is extremely refreshing. She maintains that, “if I respond to the questions that would imply that they had the right to be asked in the first place.” She proves beyond the shadow of a doubt and with great support that she is the best person for the job regardless of gender. In the end she was confirmed for the Vice Presidency almost unanimously (Runyon was the exception) solely on merit, because the fact that she never participated in the alleged sex acts never comes to light. Only the audience and the President know that she was cleared by sworn affidavits given by fraternity members.

“Principles only mean something when you stick by them when they are inconvenient” is the adage Hanson lives by during this trying time in her political career. It would have been easy to defend herself by proving the photos were doctored, reading the sworn statements, and pointing fingers at her hypocritical attackers. However, she proves that she was the best person (not woman, person) for the job clearly on her merit and her potential for greatness.

Butler (1997) states that linguistic survival involves a particular kind of surviving to take place in language. There is a metaphorical connection between bodily vulnerability and the type of vulnerability that is present in language. This film exemplifies the violence that can occur due to gender inequalities in the public sphere, not to mention all over the world in every type of arena.

Laine Hanson uses every internal resource and shuns every inherent defense mechanism she has to survive the language that is attacking her. Between Hanson's tactics and Butler's (1997) theories this film proved that the film's tag line was accurate, "sometimes you can assassinate a leader without even firing a shot."

This film tackles issues prevalent in feminist theory and criticism such as sexual discrimination, diversity in the workplace, femininity, motherhood, and abortion rights just to name a few. Through the use of language and analysis of violent language, the film proved to have the rhetorical potential to challenge the status quo perspectives of women in politics. More films like *The Contender* (2000) are needed to begin the process of changing societal perspectives.

Summary

This chapter explored how each film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000) function rhetorically to create shared meaning and a mutual understanding of the political process. Each film had rhetorical significance because of the nature of the issues explored and the way in which American values are depicted.

The audience may see a stark contrast between the ways in which *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) portrays the American political establishment opposed to *Wag the Dog*

(1997) or *Power* (1986) for instance. Each film depicts a new and interesting version of elections, party politics and political activity. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) allows the audience to witness good will, hard work, and ingenuity working to fight a corrupt political enterprise and winning the fight. This film was a cultural product of its time and has historical significance to this study.

The Candidate (1972), in contrast to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), provides a differing view of political activity and allows the audience to see how political advisors can change the personal personae of a candidate. This film also may lead the audience to question the motives of the voter. Viewers may worry about the advisors' platform winning the election rather than McKay and his ideals, but we learn that neither moral ideals nor the manufactured candidate win. In the end, the good looks and personal viability of the candidate win the election.

Power (1986) gives the audience another glimpse into the world of political consultants and advisors, but it does so from the perspective of the consultant. This film portrays a slick political consultant whose love of power and money eventually turns sour. Pete St. John learns that the candidate and the platform do matter. This film parallels the happy ending of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) more so than that of *The Candidate* (1972) because the audience may see a change of heart in *Power* (1986) that never emerges in *The Candidate* (1972).

Primary Colors (1998) is a fascinating film and important to include in the study because of the nonfiction implications of the story. An audience may watch this film, and depending on their perspective, may actually feel like they are watching Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign unfold. The primary theme of this film rests strongly in the phrase, "do the wrong things for the right reasons." Jack Stanton knows he is the best candidate with the greatest potential to help

people; therefore, he does whatever it takes to get elected and that “whatever” takes the form of lying, embellishing, manipulation and playing dirty politics on occasion. He feels that he is justified in activities because the end justifies the means. This film mirrors many of the sentiments in *Wag the Dog* (1997) because we do not always get the most flattering view of the political establishment.

Wag the Dog (1997) portrays a political organization that lacks redeeming values. It depicts manipulation, trickery, and paints a very dim picture of the American public. Americans in this film are thought to be gullible and naïve. This film may cause audiences to pause and take a critical gaze at their elected officials and candidates. It is promoted as a comedy but its satirical nature and coincidental mirror of reality may raise questions in the mind of many Americans. It is natural to wonder if this can really happen.

The Contender (2000) portrays a strong woman fighting a battle for all women everywhere. In her attempt to gain confirmation to become the first female Vice President, she must endure offensive, inappropriate questions that do not pertain to the situation at hand. This is all in the name of outdated gender roles and philosophies that translate into the idea that women do not have the potential for greatness. The film has a progressive ending and bodes well for the future of women in politics. This film is reminiscent of *Power* (1986), and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) because the audience can feel hopeful about the future of politics. After long struggles that seem futile, integrity wins in the end.

Each of these films helps to create a mutual understanding amongst audience members about how the political establishment works and fails at times. In the spectrum of films chosen for this study, as a researcher, I can recognize old fashioned values, realistic situations and those scenarios that are just far fetched enough that one wonders if they could really happen.

CHAPTER THREE

Political Reflection and American Values

In the previous chapter, I explored how each of the films in the study function rhetorically, through their interpretation of political events, to try to serve their persuasive purposes. In this chapter, I will answer the question: how do political films reflect a political consciousness of society through the depiction of American values? In order to answer this question, I will discuss each of the values found in the films and organize these appeals by answering each of the following sub-questions: how are the values identifiable? What values receive the most emphasis? And how were values employed in the scenarios within the film?

Each of the films has powerful positive and negative messages embedded within them. Some of the films celebrated themes in a fun carefree way; others are threatening because of their use of stark over and under tones, while still maintaining an entertainment value. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) offers a summation of all the themes and thoughts found within each of the films. I will be using *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) as a framework to discuss the values found in each of the films. Many values are exemplified in a similar tone, and some values found in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* are noticeably absent in other films.

The values embedded in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) are honor, integrity, democracy/patriotism, successful political strategy, and power. Honor, integrity, power, and democracy/patriotism are basic values that typically correspond with what are traditionally considered American values. Political strategy however, is not usually considered valuable in the traditional sense of the word. In the context of political films competitive, and successful political strategy is highly valued. Thus, political strategy is a value appeal for the purposes of this study. Political strategy is explained with more detail for each instance it is identified.

Not all values are apparent in each film, however they do appear in different forms and clusters in the various scenes and scenarios depicted. This is a complete list of the values that will be discussed to answer the question: do political films reflect a political consciousness of society through the depiction of American values? In the following sections I will discuss each film in terms of the values embedded within them. There are occasions where some values overlap, or particular scenes lend themselves to multiple value appeals. I begin with *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the framework for this chapter.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)

In my analytical lens, as I stated previously, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) is a film that captures the essence of American values in film. Each of the films in this study depicts at least some of the values seen in this film. To begin, I focus on the values apparent in this film and how they are portrayed. The identifiable value premises evident in this film are honor, integrity, democracy/patriotism, political strategy, and power. In order to fully explore the rhetorical potential and meanings within these films, every value is presented.

Honor

How is this value identifiable?

Honor is identified early on in the plot of the film. In this context, honor typically refers to something or someone holding high esteem or a strong, solid reputation. High esteem and reputation are characteristics of Mr. Smith and his actions that are woven into the fabric of this film.

In the beginning of the film, the governor's children are taken with Mr. Smith's devotion to the Boy Rangers and the praise he received for putting out forest fires. He also loves learning, especially history and government. He respects nature and is very much in awe of the world

around him. This, however, is just an introduction to Mr. Smith. The audience has not yet met him. Once the audience has the opportunity to meet the man behind the reputation, they see someone who is bright eyed and enthusiastic. He is humbled by the attention he is receiving and especially grateful for his new position as Senator. After his appointment, Mr. Smith meets nothing but pessimistic doubters who lost their faith in the political system long ago.

After arriving in Washington, Mr. Smith meets the press and he is excited to share his opinions and demonstrate his unique talents to the eager gentleman of the Press Corp. This is Mr. Smith's first taste of malicious behavior in the big city. Everything Mr. Smith says and does in his interviews is taken out of context and he is labeled a fool for the world to see. After reading the paper and seeing the embarrassing photographs, Mr. Smith fights for his own honor. Violence typically is not regarded as an honorable option today but in this film it was acceptable. Once Mr. Smith found the Press Corp, he manages to knock out every reporter he spoke with the previous day. They now know not to take Jefferson Smith for a fool.

Regardless of the attitudes of others, Mr. Smith always keeps his head up and he continues to appreciate his newfound position of influence. His first order of business as Senator is to create a boys camp on land near his home. This again, is a very honorable undertaking. Unfortunately, it is much harder to push through than he expected.

How is this value emphasized?

Primarily Mr. Smith's pessimistic counterparts emphasize this value appeal. As the audience views this film Mr. Smith is obviously a nice, likeable man with no malice or ulterior motives directed toward his new position. However, he cannot turn a corner without running into hard living people who have let the corruption in politics and in Washington replace their spirit with a cynical attitude.

The audience may not think of Smith as a remarkable person until they are exposed to everyone else in the film. His honor and charm is not evident until it is compared to everyone else's obvious lack of honor and charm. Ms. Saunders, Smith's Congressional assistant, is one of the most pessimistic cynics he encounters, but as her fondness for Smith grows she begins to become more and more like Smith, and she becomes one of the more honorable characters in the film. She learns what it means to be good hearted and strong willed.

Another honorable character emerges toward the very end of the film. During Smith's filibuster, the President of the Senate nonverbally shows great respect and esteem for Smith's actions. He even seems to be enjoying the situation. The audience may read that this man understands Smith's anguish and knows that he will come out on top in the end. It appears that he believes that Smith is innocent of all of the charges brought against him and admires his persistence.

Smith's honor is emphasized in contrast to everyone else's dishonor. However, by the end, Smith inspires others to follow his lead. Without the dishonor of the other characters, Smith's boyish charm and respectable nature would go unnoticed and be less than interesting.

How is this value employed?

Honor is employed in this film to inspire the audience to believe in Smith's cause. Without this value apparent in the film the audience may not show any interest in Smith's entrance to the senate, nor the false charges brought against him by his colleagues. Smith's honor, esteem, and reputation lay a necessary foundation for the audience to root for Smith's victory and his colleagues' demise. Honor is essential to the plot of the film, and the potential interest of the audience.

Integrity

How is this value identifiable?

Integrity is another important value woven throughout *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and in this context is defined as a moral soundness. This moral soundness is apparent in both its presence and absence in the film. Smith is portrayed as a man of the highest integrity, he always does what is right and what is expected of him and has difficulty understanding why others would not act in the same manner. Smith's integrity is what allows him to enter the Senate and it also facilitates his potential fall from grace. Because Smith does not want to believe that others could act in morally corrupt ways, he does not plan on his entrance into the Senate to be anything but genuine.

Smith walks into the Senate with pride and with plans to make his state a better place. He seeks inspiration from the various monuments in Washington and decides to make the most of his position. Once his dreams are crushed, he still does not change. Regardless of the difficulty he faces in his new position, he decides not to let it change his views of his country, which he loves. He has doubt at times, but he overcomes these feelings and is able to move forward and win over his colleagues' malevolence.

How is this value emphasized?

Very much like honor, integrity is also emphasized through the other characters' lack of integrity. Mr. Smith is always portrayed as a virtuous man who has the best of intentions. Ms. Saunders did not lack integrity, but integrity was not her strongest attribute in the beginning of the film. However, as she gains inspiration from Smith she begins to understand the importance of fighting for what is decent and right in the world.

As the movie progresses, and Smith stages his filibuster, we can slowly see the corruption embedded within Congress dissipate. Many Senators appear disgusted with Smith and are not at all pleased at the turn of events. After several hours, they begin to believe in Smith and realize if he were guilty of the illegal activity he is accused of, he would not be going to so much trouble to clear his name. This realization brings out the best in many Senators as they reevaluate their own careers and how they began in politics. They are ashamed of the path they took and want to give Smith an opportunity to do the appropriate thing and act in the best interest of his constituency.

Toward the end of the film, Smith's Boy Rangers back home also display great integrity. They believe in Smith and know he is innocent. They take it upon themselves to run special editions of Smith's Boy Ranger newspaper to help exonerate Smith. This event is juxtaposed with scenes depicting the opposite endeavor, because the professional newspapers are running stories about Smith's guilt and lack of remorse for his illegal activity. The newspaper publishers appear aligned with the corrupt Senators who are causing Smith's trouble.

How is this value employed?

Integrity is used to gain support for Smith from the audience, and the corruption within the film may be frustrating for a viewer, because Mr. Smith comes into the story as a very naïve and trusting man, and an audience may want him to recognize that things are not always as they may seem. Integrity is also employed to help the audience see how politics can play out in both an upstanding and corrupt manner. A viewer can see both sides of a story and make more informed choices about politics and public service after being exposed to scenarios within films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

Democracy/Patriotism

Democracy and patriotism are important values embedded within *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). In this context, democracy is defined as a political orientation that favors a government that is ultimately controlled by the citizens within the nation. Patriotism is a great love of one's country, and Mr. Smith is known for having a great respect of government and history and this knowledge is another quality that allows him to attain this appointment within the Senate.

How are these values identifiable?

This value is easily identified once Mr. Smith arrives in Washington D.C., because he keeps his assistant waiting for hours while he tours the city and all of the monuments. He wants to gain inspiration and remind himself of the enormity of this new endeavor. The next day he decides that in order to get in the mood to begin work on Capitol Hill he would visit Mount Vernon, George Washington's home. These small gestures may not seem significant, however; they add up to a man who appreciates democracy and all the dedication and suffering it took in order to make his country great.

How are these values emphasized?

Again, focusing on Smith's deference of democracy and everyone else's disrespect for it emphasizes this value. When Mr. Smith rode with Ms. Saunders shortly after arriving in Washington, he asks her about certain monuments and she does not understand his interest. She has lived there for years and never visited anything of historical significance. Smith's colleagues seem to have little regard for democracy, and they appointed Smith to the Senate because they wanted to manipulate him and the system. They are presented as public officials who have minimal respect for democratic principles.

How are these value appeals employed?

This value appeal is employed to demonstrate how some of the most powerful people within the democratic system can disrespect the principles and ignore the ideals that allowed them to be elected in the first place. Men of the senate are portrayed as if they care only about themselves and little about the people they are sworn to represent. This value is also used to show that there are still good upstanding people in the world that want to do the desirable thing for the right reasons. For example, Mr. Smith and Ms. Saunders work diligently to fight the corruption and clear Smith's name. During the filibuster, the Senators start to feel remorse for what they have done and how poorly they have behaved. They want to help Smith fight the spurious allegations.

Political strategy

Political strategy is one of the themes within the film that make it memorable. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) is filled with impressive political strategy. The strategies and tactics employed are used for both worthy and depraved motives throughout the film. Both the protagonists and antagonists use political strategy to further their causes in the film.

How is this value identifiable?

Manipulative political strategy is prevalent in this film. This strategy is labeled manipulative because every action taken by the men in power was calculated and cunning. First, Mr. Smith's appointment to the Senate was strategic from the beginning. Supporters sought to find some one who possessed minimal political savvy and who could be directed to go along with whatever the senior Senators suggest.

The senior Senators also used manipulative strategy when they attempted to expel Smith from Congress. Only when they become aware of Smith's persistence and drive and realize their

own miscalculation they decide to accuse Smith of fraud. Smith drafts a bill to make the land surrounding Willett Creek available for a Boy's Camp. The disgruntled senior Senators are threatened by Smith's tenacity so they forged documents and bribed witnesses to testify that Smith had purchased the land surrounding Willett Creek shortly before leaving for Washington, and would benefit financially from any activity on the land. In order to battle these charges Smith, with the help of Saunders, stages a 24- hour filibuster, which is a tactic for delaying or obstructing legislation by making long speeches. He was trying to prevent legislation to have him expelled from the Senate. This turned out to be a brilliant strategy and the most memorable scene in the film.

How is this value emphasized?

The strongest emphasis of political strategy is the beginning and end of the film. Strategy is used throughout the entire film, however its best use is when the Senators appoint Smith for less than wholesome reasons and then get their comeuppance at the end of the film when Smith gains redemption through his own savvy political strategy. This is a calculating move on Smith's part, which meets the requirement of manipulative strategy.

How is this value employed?

The emphasis in this value makes the film dramatic and suspenseful. The film is really bottom heavy. The majority of the action against Smith happens within the last thirty minutes of the film. As the audience watches they may think that Smith does not stand a chance. However, the strategies that Smith employs slowly wear on the Senators and they gradually begin to support him. As Paine, his senior Senator tires he begins to feel guilty for how he has treated a young, bright eyed, enthusiastic man. At the end we see Paine admit what he has done and Smith is redeemed.

Power

Power is an inherent force in anything political. Some politicians crave power in any form, and that proves to be a dangerous road to take. Others want to gain power to make the world a better place by having influence. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) we see both kinds of power play at work.

How is this value identifiable?

The value is identifiable in both subtle and obvious ways. Mr. Smith never seems like a man who desires great power and influence in the world. Before entering Congress he was content working with young boys and trying to mold them into tomorrow's leaders and all around good people. When Smith is appointed to Congress he is handed power on a silver platter, and he really does not know what to make of it. He decides that through this new found power and influence he will draft a bill to create space for a boys' camp. That is a solid use of power that is ultimately for the greater gain of his constituency.

Smith's colleagues are depicted as power hungry wolves that will do anything to gain power and influence at any cost. They are manipulative and dishonest in their endeavors and do nothing worthwhile with their power. The juxtaposition of the two different power stances makes the struggle within the film interesting and captivating.

How is this value emphasized?

Power is emphasized within the film through the senior Senators' use of corruption to gain their power. They accuse Smith of doing the exact thing that they are doing, because they had been quietly buying up all the land around the dam at Willett Creek, and holding it in dummy names. They were then going to sell the land and make a profit from it.

Power is also emphasized through Smith's lack of desire for power and influence as well as his need to act on the behalf of his constituency with whatever power he has acquired. He wants to make Willett Creek and the land around it a place for boys to become strong and test their abilities in the wild. He certainly never thought to gain a profit from the land or the boy's camp.

How is this value employed?

Power is employed in the film to demonstrate how dangerous it can be if placed in the wrong hands. It proves that good people can become powerful people and that power can change them, especially in the case of Senator Paine. He admits that he was once like Smith and the political life and the power that went along with it changed him and allowed him to act corruptly.

Smith proves that if power is used properly in the political context, many people can benefit from it. He has solid intentions and was unfortunately punished for it. Respectable behavior did win in the end; therefore, this film shows the audience that malicious forces do not always have to dominate the political establishment.

The Candidate (1972)

The Candidate (1972) is similar to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)* in a variety of ways. The protagonist is an idealist with honorable intentions, but the political machine morphs him into a new kind of candidate, a candidate he resisted becoming. The values identified in this film are honor, integrity, political strategy and power. I will be employing the same definitions for these values as in the previous sections.

Honor

How is this value identifiable?

Bill McKay played by Robert Redford is *The Candidate* (1972). He is a thoughtful man of high esteem with a solid reputation. In the beginning of the film, he is an attorney who is trying to make his state a better place to live. He works for a legal aid clinic and fights for the rights of women and minorities. He is perfectly content working as a private citizen for the greater good of the population without becoming part of the political establishment. He believes that politics and politicians cause more problems than they are solving.

McKay is approached about joining the Senate race as a progressive candidate working under the assumption that he would lose the race. He reluctantly agrees. His opponent is Crocker Jarmon, an 18 year veteran of the Senate. During his press conference to announce his candidacy he says that his reason for running was because the incumbent is not in touch with how real people of California live.

McKay enters the race under the condition that he could run the race in an honorable way. He was going to be honest, straightforward and leave the political speak to his opponent. He wants to run a fair race and if he wins he wants to win on principle only. One of his primary concerns is his connection with his father. His father is a former governor of California and known for corruption and crooked dealings. He wants to separate himself from his father and stand on his own solid reputation.

How is this value emphasized?

Honor is emphasized through McKay's hesitation to become part of a morally corrupt system of government. He is not the most eloquent man when he is asked to speak. He vacillates and pauses when he addresses the public and that makes him seem all the more

qualified for the job, because his lack of polish and rehearsed speeches gives the impression that he is a regular person wanting to make a difference. At this point, California is weary of the professional politicians and anyone contrasting seems viable. He cares about the people of California and not the title. Despite his hesitation he does know that the people of his state need another choice for leadership. McKay is progressive and has new and interesting perspectives on what should and should not happen in government. He witnesses Jarmon's political style and recognizes it as shallow and impersonal. He knows that California needs another option.

How is this value employed?

This value is employed through McKay's use of raw honesty and his disgust for any operative who tries to persuade him to evade the issues. McKay wants to speak from his heart and not use political tactics to attract voters. This appeal is also employed through the use of corrupt political advisors and operatives who lie to McKay about his freedom to run a straightforward campaign without using strategy and tactics. His advisors work hard to play politics behind the scenes, altering videotapes, and taking McKay's statements out of context.

Integrity

How is this value identifiable?

Integrity refers to a moral soundness within the character and personality of a person. This value appeal is easily identifiable in McKay. He has no interest in dirty or corrupt politics because it goes against everything he believes and he understands the implications that surround political tricks and maneuvers because he witnessed that life when his father was Governor. He works hard to distance himself from his father and his father's definition of politics despite the power in his name.

His character has every intention of losing and his only motivation for running this race is to illustrate the point that there are other options when choosing a candidate. Neither he nor his operatives think he has much of a chance now, however, his belief seems to be that slowly he can change the face of politics by strategically situating a new perspective out in the world. Once that perspective is recognized a new candidate can run and win in the next election.

How is this value emphasized?

This value is emphasized in a fashion similar to many of the appeals in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), by the absence of integrity. McKay's operatives and advisors show little integrity because they are out to win an election and do whatever it takes to accomplish that goal. Regardless of McKay's wishes, they go against everything he believes in and he begins to feel like a helpless hostage to his own campaign. He has very little control over the machine running his life, but he can control what he says in personal appearances. Unfortunately, once that appearance is on tape his operatives run with it and turn it into sound bites taken out of context and new meanings emerge.

How is this value employed?

Integrity is employed in a way that makes the audience believe in McKay as an unyielding candidate. He comes off as an authentic person who cares about his potential constituency. At the conclusion the audience may walk away with a good feeling about McKay and think of him as someone with genuine ability to govern effectively.

McKay's integrity is also evident by a contrasting lack of integrity seen in those who work for him. Because of his operatives' perspective on how to win an election, he eventually loses touch with the ideals that guided him before he was a candidate. By the end of the election he is so confused and frustrated he forgets why he is even running for election. In fact, once he

wins the election (much to everyone's surprise) he no longer knows what to do. The first words he utters after winning was a question to his primary advisor, "what do we do now?"

Political strategy

How is this value identifiable?

Political strategy is one of the most prevalent value appeals within this film. Manipulative political strategy is identifiable from beginning to end. Again, this strategy is labeled manipulative because McKay's advisors manipulate him with calculated moves that he is never aware of until the damage is done and he is in too deep to emerge with the idealist attitude he portrayed in the beginning of the campaign. The first time we see this in action is in the first scene when McKay is asked to run for senate. By telling him that he has no chance of winning, but he could change the status quo within the political establishment, they are manipulating him and his sense of what it means to run a clean and straightforward campaign. His life's work revolves around changing his environment and making it better. If he has the opportunity to actually change politics and the way it has been operating for so long, especially if he only has to be in the public eye for a short time, he will do it. He never expects, nor did he want, to win. In telling him that he will not win, they are using a manipulative strategy against him to convince him to sign on as their candidate.

How is this value emphasized?

The Candidate (1972) also emphasizes pragmatic political strategy through the use of obvious tactics used to get candidates elected. His advisors and operatives go to great lengths to find the perfect sound bites and stop McKay from hurting his own campaign by being too honest about his platform. McKay strongly believes in a woman's right to choose; yet when he is asked about it they coach him to evade the issue. This is also a strategy of avoidance and it is evident

throughout the film because McKay's idealist honesty is not an effective campaign plan in the eyes of his advisors.

How is this value employed?

Political Strategy is used to demonstrate just how much detail and planning goes into a political campaign. Anyone who is not at all experienced with political life may not understand just how complicated and difficult this process can be. This particular campaign is more difficult than most because McKay is not politically savvy and that turns out to be his own best strategy, or a strategy of sincerity. The real Bill McKay, before the advising and campaigning, is a sincere person who wants to improve the standards of living for all of the people of California. His lack of polish and occasional slip of truthfulness is indicative of a strategy of sincerity.

McKay is not political and did not want to be political. His lack of experience is refreshing to the audience and when the opportunity presents itself he speaks from his heart and not his preplanned/pre-approved notes, much to his advisors' dismay. This appeal is employed through the juxtaposition of contrasting values within McKay's campaign. Initially, McKay has no desire to win, but he does want to change the face of politics, and in order to change that face he needs to campaign. His advisors want to win and they pull every political trick out of the hat in order to do it. This is an effective employment of political strategy in the film, because the audience sees two totally different tactics within the same campaign.

Power (1986)

Power (1986) is an interesting film that entails several small plotlines that revolve around one large scandal all involving political campaigns and one very suave political consultant, Pete St. John, played by Richard Gere. St. John is depicted as a greedy, win at all cost political consultant. He changes his clients' lives in order to transform them into winnable, likeable

personalities that can and will win an election. The observable value appeals present in this film are honor, integrity, political strategy and power.

Honor

How is this value identifiable?

Honor is not an easily identifiable value appeal in the first half of the film. St. John is not portrayed as being a man of high esteem or solid reputation. He is known as being loyal to only money and his success in getting candidates elected. Since St. John will do anything to get someone elected he has the reputation as a greedy scoundrel.

There are several glimpses of St. John's rarely noticed honorable side in the film, especially toward the end. The first time we see him act with concern for someone else is when he learns that his dear friend and client, Senator Hastings, is ill and leaving his Senate seat. He genuinely cares for this man and is saddened by the news. He offers to help in any way.

Very late in the film we see St. John make a swift change in his attitudes and actions. He worked hard to get Hastings' replacement, Cade, elected but later decides that his client was part of a deception that would undo all of the important accomplishments of Hastings during his tenure in the Senate. After coming to this realization, St. John starts advising the independent candidate, Philip Aarons, to express his real beliefs even though he has no chance of winning. After doing this Cade comes in a distant third behind Aarons and the winning candidate, Westbrook. This becomes a moral victory for St. John and he appears to enjoy his turn about with this campaign.

How is this value emphasized?

Honor in this film is emphasized through St. John's utter lack of it throughout most of the film. His ex-wife, Sydney explains how St. John has become a terrible person who does not care

who he hurts through the campaigning process. Buckley, his former mentor completely agrees and is hurt by his actions and lack of regard for others. On the other hand however, when St. John learns of Hastings' alleged illness and later when Cade turns out to be a less than stellar candidate, he makes a concerted effort to act honestly and campaign for the best person for the job.

St. John is not alone in his lack of esteem, reputation and regard for anything other than money. The clients he works with are only interested in winning and their motives do not always add up to being the best person for the constituency. Cade, for instance, is funded by oil money and is running for office under the condition that if he wins he will completely disregard any legislation that could eliminate the need for fossil fuel. Additionally, Hastings lies about his illness and is leaving the Senate to avoid a scandal involving unpaid high interest loans given by the oil companies, taken by his wife, Claire. This is all an attempt to blackmail Hastings into voting for big oil and against the environment. St. John, with the help of his ex-wife Sydney, begins to slowly expose this potential scandal. This scandal is what turns St. John's life around and slowly made him realize the hurtful life he was leading.

How is this value employed?

As previously mentioned, honor is used very sparsely in this film, but when it is present it is used to slowly gain support for St. John. He has a very unscrupulous way of getting his candidates elected. He is calculating and manipulative. The audience may feel troubled at the manner in which their candidates get elected. However, the audience can take comfort knowing that consultants can change and worthy candidates can get elected.

Integrity

How is this value identifiable?

Like honor, integrity can be hard to identify in this film, but there are moments when the characters show great moral soundness in the face of dishonor, manipulation, and greed. Along with showing some integrity late in the film, St. John's ex-wife also reflects genuine integrity. All of the main characters in this film contribute to a general lack of integrity in political campaigning.

St. John gains insight from the pain he feels. He is lied to by one of his oldest friends, Hastings, and then made aware of a scandal that involves the oil company funding his biggest client. St. John's world is turned upside down and it is obvious that this makes him reassess his success, wealth and the cost of that wealth. Through the same acts showing integrity by his friends, Sydney and Buckley, he discovers there are more important things in life than wealth and winning.

How is this value emphasized?

Integrity is emphasized through Sydney and Buckley's concern for St. John. They do not approve of the path he has taken and the means by which he gets his candidates elected. He uses deceit and takes full control of his clients. For example he becomes the consultant for the gubernatorial candidate of New Mexico, Wallace Furmann. Furmann is portrayed as boring and pasty with no interesting qualities. In order to make him a more attractive candidate, St. John suggests that he uses a tanning bed despite his family's history of skin cancer. Moreover, St. John is running a South American campaign, and in order to get that candidate elected he capitalizes on a tragic terrorist bombing in the candidate's region and asks him to wear a blood

stained shirt in every public appearance to remind his country of the importance of a regime change.

How is this value employed?

The above illustrations make St. John's rapid change for the better all the more impressive to an audience. An audience may recognize the difficulty involved in changing a lifestyle so drastically. In addition to St. John's change of heart, Aarons is a character and a candidate that most voters can support. He believes in changing the world for the better and joins the race because he believes that the other candidates do not have the state's best interest at heart and wants to fight for such issues as a better environment for the state of Ohio. His election platform is based on integrity.

Political strategy

How is this value identifiable?

This film is based on the political strategy of illusion and manipulation from start to finish. This strategy is named illusion because St. John can contort a situation and create an appearance of credibility, competency and charisma. This is exemplified in the first scene of the film. During the terrorist bombing in South America, St. John has the ability to take that tragic situation and make it work to his candidate's advantage. He asks his candidate to benefit from that event and wear a blood stained shirt at every rally to remind the people of his country that change is necessary and he is the man that can make their country safer. That political strategy is used to get his South American candidate elected.

Next, St. John stages an old time western scene in order for Furmann to look more like a native of New Mexico rather than a privileged white man from New York. While riding this horse, which Furmann looks uncomfortable with from the beginning, he falls off as the horse

bucks. At first St. John and his crew think this was a wash and a waste of money. Later when St. John examines the tape, he notices that Furmann gave the illusion of an experienced rider immediately before he fell. St. John edits the tape so the fall was not included and gives the impression that Furmann belongs in New Mexico more so that one may have originally thought.

Later St. John stages an impromptu debate with Andrea Stannard, his candidate from Washington State. This would have been typical if Stannard had engaged in the debate. He takes a planned public appearance and bombards her with questions and accusations, but never gives her the opportunity to respond. He just builds a platform for her, winks and walks away. This was a clever, yet subtle illusion. With the use of illusion, the audience sees the thought that goes into political advertisements and events and how much staging, planning, and reacting goes into creating those thirty second spots. St. John is a gifted editor when political advertising is at stake. Stannard is accused of abandoning her family for a younger man, while her opponent looks like an upstanding family man. Rather than addressing the issues, St. John takes the advertisement with the accusations and uses animated mud splatters to cover Stannard's face. Instead of dignifying the accusation, he makes her opponent look like a mudslinger, who does not campaign fairly.

How is this value emphasized?

The effort St. John puts forth in these campaigns is unfathomable, yet he has the drive to get his candidates elected so it never seems like effort. He makes it look fun and he looks like he loves every minute of it. This impression lasts right up until he realizes that he is being manipulated in the same way that he manipulates his clients and the voters.

How is this value employed?

Political strategy is going to be present in any kind of political endeavor; however there are several ways these tactics can be employed. In this film we see the very extreme use of strategy as well as subtle, less manipulative tactics. He is willing to go to great measures to get his clients elected, such as exploit a terrorist bombing and shoot elaborate campaign commercials that could potentially change the personae of the candidate. Furmann is running for the governor's seat in New Mexico but his pasty, lackluster character made St. John's job difficult. Thus, he works to give the voters the illusion that he belongs there. This is St. John's attempt to make Furmann look like he fits the mold of a local resident of New Mexico and not someone used to the hustle and bustle of a New York City lifestyle. Both subtle and extreme measures have the intended effect. This illustrates how a consultant or a candidate can take a morally solid path just as easily as they can be calculating and manipulative.

Power

How is this value identifiable?

Politics is a quest to gain or maintain power, and every action in this film is attempting to do just that, as implied by the name of the film, *Power* (1986). The candidates are trying to get elected in order to gain power. St. John is working hard to get them elected to make more money, which translates into power. Power is an important possession and most will use almost any means to win power for profitable gains.

How is this value emphasized?

Power is emphasized through the means by which the consultants and candidates attempt to acquire it. St. John takes advantage of a terrorist bombing and the subsequent pain of others in order to gain power. The oil company extorts money from a Senator's wife and ruins the lives of

the people involved with the Senator in order to sway votes, to gain power. Aarons' campaign and reasons for running for election are the most honest and dignified attempt to gain power in the film and through the most modest means apparent in the film, he does make an impression and gives his loyal supporters hope for a better future. St. John learns, by the end of the film, that power is not worth the high price he has paid and the pain he has caused along the way. The ends no longer justify the means.

How is this value employed?

Power is employed in a manner that illustrates the high cost of playing dirty, manipulative politics. Political strategy is not depicted in a flattering manner. It is calculating and controlling throughout the entire film and makes political life appear unattractive and unethical. Despite the glimpse of morality at the conclusion of the film, an audience member may walk away feeling deceived by the entire campaigning process.

Primary Colors (1998)

Primary Colors (1998) is an important film to include in this study because it is loosely based on Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign. This film may have the most value toward answering the question: do political films reflect political consciousness through the depiction of American values because it is rooted in reality and the outcomes may provide insight into how values play out in a real campaign that ended successfully. The values evident in this film are honor, integrity, democracy/patriotism, and political strategy.

Honor

How is this value identifiable?

The characters in this film are complex and colorful. Each character has his or her strengths and weakness and their weaknesses tend to be less than honorable. The story is told

through the eyes of Henry Burton. Burton is a young man interested in political campaigns, but not any political campaign. He wants to work for a candidate who has the people's best interest at heart and not a greedy person who wants to gain power solely for the wealth and influence it brings, and he joins the Stanton campaign after meeting Jack Stanton. The first time he sees Stanton in action he is taken aback by Stanton's embodiment of empathy and compassion. He is moved to join the campaign immediately. He had not seen that kind of care in campaigning in his lifetime, he had only heard about it longingly.

Burton sees Jack Stanton as a man who has the potential to be a decent, honorable man however, most of the time he sees Stanton as a womanizer, and in times of desperation he finds the campaign trail exhausting. He thinks that Stanton does have what it takes to be a good President and leader, but he has his weaknesses and most manifest as weaknesses with women. Despite the problematic nature of Jack Stanton's campaign, he does seem to be the lesser of the evils in Burton's experience with politics and campaigns. Burton had never found a candidate who actually did care about the people he or she promised to represent.

Burton's grandfather was a famous civil rights leader and he wants to work for a candidate who cares about minorities and wants to continue to support legislation that will help forward the lives of America's minority population. He sees that Jack Stanton is the type of candidate who could get that job done.

Stanton's wife, Susan, is strong willed and one of the more honorable characters in the film. She also wants to do what is right and usually does. Jack Stanton wants to do right by the people and Susan wants to do right by the campaign. She knows that he is the best person for the job and tries to keep the nuts and the bolts of the campaign in place and tightened. Any of her dishonorable moments are usually an attempt to keep everything running smoothly.

Libby Holden is one of Stanton's support staff and long time friend. She is his dust buster, or the one who cleans up all of his mistakes. She loves Jack and knows with all of her heart that he should be President. He taught her everything she knows about politics and campaigning. He taught her that in order to win one must run a positive campaign and never focus on the negative, always stick to the issues. She despises any kind of mudslinging and knows that Jack can win on merit alone.

How is this value emphasized?

Honor is emphasized in a variety of ways throughout the film. First, it is emphasized through its absence. Stanton tends to do the wrong things for the right reasons. For example, in the beginning of the film, he is speaking with an adult literacy group and he tells a very touching story of his Uncle Charlie, who was a courageous war hero but did not have the courage to learn how to read. Burton is taken with this story but later meets Charlie and learns that the story was all a fabrication. However, he could tell that Stanton did care about those people and lied to illustrate a point. He becomes impressed with how he operates, despite his various versions of the truth.

Later in the film Stanton asks Libby to see if his opponent has any illegal activities in his past. They receive a tip that something may not be accurate and they want the rest of the story. Burton and Libby find much more than they bargained for, and they were saddened by the personal nature of the information. In order to gain the information, Burton and Libby pose as part of the opponent's campaign team. This is not an admirable endeavor, however they take the honorable approach once they collected the file. Since they had learned about painfully personal information involving drugs, sex, and cheating among other numerous scandalous activities, Libby knows she has to test the Stantons. The Stantons, that she knew and loved, would not use

the information in the file because it was negative and wrong to win using cheap tactics that are anything but honorable.

The Stanton's do not hesitate to use the information, which means that they are going to leak it to the newspapers first thing the next morning. This breaks Libby's heart and disappoints Burton. She told them that they could do whatever they want with the file, but she is saddened by their choice. She does threaten to blackmail them if they use what was in the file. She was going to leak an equally dangerous story to the press about Stanton fathering a child with a teenager and faking the blood test to disprove paternity, if they go through with the leak. In her attempt to be honorable, she acted in a manner as distasteful as that she was fighting. Libby's despair leads her to take her own life, and in light of this event, Stanton gives the entire file to his opponent to do with whatever he sees fit. Stanton wants to honor Libby and do what she would have wanted.

How is this value employed?

Honor is employed in this film in a manner that suggests that several wrongs may be necessary to make a right. Stanton wins the election and becomes President. The audience watches him act in wonderfully charismatic ways, but they have also seen him lie, cheat, and act sexually irresponsible. Still Jack Stanton continued to be a likeable character and persuaded the voters that he was the best person for the job. Honor is used to illustrate the point that the people that who are good at heart typically do win in the end. Honor is presented as if it is essentially ceremonial, and the film may remind the audience of the saying that there is honor among thieves.

Integrity

How is this value identifiable?

Integrity is scarce in this film, but it is evident in certain characters. Libby is a woman of the strongest morality, and she knows right from wrong, even if she may choose a wrong path to get a job done. At one point in the film, she aims a gun at a man who had taken liberty with a taped cell phone conversation of Stanton's and with fancy editing made it sound like he was having a scandalous conversation with another woman. She, like Stanton, is doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. Her tactic, however, works, because the man admitted he did the editing and went on the record to clear Stanton's name.

Stanton's wife, Susan, is also of the strongest integrity but she is not always in control of the situations that call for her level headed style. All of the people around Stanton reflect integrity inconsistently. Stanton himself appears to need a frequent reminder about acting with integrity all the time. Stanton does provide the audience with glimpses of a morally solid, sound individual, but just as quickly, an audience can see a man who also gives in to character weaknesses.

How is this value emphasized?

Integrity is underscored by Stanton's inconsistency as a leader. We see his entire campaign staff act in his best interest and be key factors in his victories. Every time he makes a mistake, his staff and family clean up after him before the public can find out about it. While he is likable, the audience may sympathize with the supporters around him.

How is this value employed?

Integrity is employed to gain support for the campaign workers and family members who know that Jack Stanton would make a great President. The audience can see that despite

Stanton's lack of regard for his family and supporters he does care about the people he wants to serve. The audience may watch this film and really see why everyone thinks that Stanton would make a good President, however his indiscretions leave the audience disappointed.

Political strategy

How is this value identifiable?

There are many strategies used in *Primary Colors* (1998), but not to the same degree as in the previous films. The strategies that are used are pragmatic strategies. These strategies are not necessarily elaborate, but they are useful for each individual campaign situation. For example, Stanton and his team work diligently to run a clean and positive campaign, this is a pragmatic strategy. He also goes out on his own, while on the campaign trail and meets people and really shows the public how he enjoys every part of the campaign process and cares about their plight. It never seems like a means to an end, because he enjoys the journey.

Stanton's strongest attribute is his ability to meet and have meaningful conversations with people in communities, great and small. He appears on talk shows, he blends in with the people when he speaks to them, and when he meets with a Jewish group he talks about foreign policy and the trouble in Israel, as if the same issues affected him personally. Just as simply as he does that, he can talk with a union group and speak from the heart about lost jobs. He is a likable man who identifies with the public. Therefore, he employs strategies of identification in addition to pragmatic strategies.

How is this value emphasized?

Stanton's use of political strategy is emphasized especially when he gets desperate. His opponent is in the hospital, from a heart attack that happened as Stanton is grilling him on issues and policies during a radio talk show. The Stanton team starts to feel desperate and vulnerable.

These feelings are what prompted Libby and Burton to go out and dig some dirt on the opponent's replacement. Even though Stanton typically runs a clean campaign, desperate times call for desperate measures, for example, running scandalous stories despite their desire to run a clean campaign. They did not want to, but they thought they had to do it.

How is this value employed?

Political Strategy is not the key ingredient of this campaign. The supporters and workers spend more time on damage control than trying to win the election through political strategies. Stanton did not need to use a lot of high tech strategies. His love of people and communities is strategy enough. He has competence and charisma and the people who meet him, like him and want to vote for him.

Wag the Dog (1997)

Wag the Dog (1997) is a film that lacks many of the more redeeming values found in the other films, i.e.: honor, integrity, patriotism, etc. However, it does value the use of political strategy. It is a film about quick thinking and split second reactions to the characters' adversity. It is an important film to include in the study because of its portrayal of political strategists after the politician is in office, how strategists can use media, and it is an interesting commentary on media consumption by the American public.

Political strategy

How is this value identifiable?

The political strategies identified in this film are strategies of diversion and this is because the characters in the film work intensely on creating a distraction for the American public to focus on and forget about the scandalous stories on the news. These strategies are apparent from the very beginning of *Wag the Dog (1997)*. Every character portrayed in the film

functions as a political strategist to some degree. The primary players in the film are professional political strategists and they are used to tense situations. The situation in this film is unique and calls for specialists, who are not familiar with the volatile nature of politics. In the beginning of the film, the audience learns that the President is accused of sexual misconduct with a Firefly Girl. The White House is overwhelmed with the buzz caused by such an allegation. They bring in Conrad Brean, a special strategist.

Brean's solution to this problem is to divert attention away from the scandal by creating the illusion of a war with the little known country, Albania. In order to pull this off, they contact a Hollywood producer, Stanley Motss, and all of his associates. Motss is reluctant and thinks it is far fetched at first. However, he slowly comes around to the idea, and after considering the possibilities, he was excited to help. This was the primary plot to the film and every event revolved around that storyline.

How is this value emphasized?

Political strategy is emphasized in the way that every character and action in the film revolves around the need to strategize and divert attention away from the President. Once they decide to stage an imaginary war and feed information about it to the press, every action emphasized the strategy of diversion.

Wag the Dog (1997) has a tense tone throughout, however, once war has been declared the tension increases. The magnitude and difficulties of this staged war poses several potential problems, most of which occur. The tone of the film helps to emphasize the enormity of such an undertaking and the tone reflects the actions and reactions of the characters.

Motss looks at every aspect of the war project as he would a film production. He brings in a team that consisted of producers, songwriters, and assistants to help him pull off this feat and

make it believable. Strangely, his team does not hesitate for a moment; they jump in and make this production work. Motss is a quick thinker and much more so than the actual political consultants. For every action is has an equal reaction that works. He has a positive attitude that makes this fantasy a reality. When Senator Neal, the President's opposition, realized that the war was staged he ends the war on national television. He tries to beat the strategists at their own game. Brean and his team feel defeated, however, Motss looks at this setback as a challenge and declares that Act I is over and Act II is about to begin.

The strategists are able to make every mishap, mistake, and pitfall work to their advantage eventually. Once the war ends prematurely, they have to divert the attention back to it and the aftermath of the war. They produce a story about a soldier left behind enemy lines and create a POW type storyline for the public to follow. To generate sympathy they create a song that sounded old, one that if the public heard and was told it was long forgotten they would "remember" it. The songwriter, played by Willie Nelson, wrote a song about an old shoe.

Since they have the idea for the song, they need to find a soldier that had shoe in his name. In the special service area of government they find Willie Schumann. He is a convicted rapist serving his time in prison. Since they already have the man and planted the story they have to follow through with it. While they are trying to get him to his staged welcome back service, he is shot and killed. At first this causes panic, however they once again make it work to their advantage. Instead of having a welcome home service, they hold a very public memorial service with full military honors. This was used to emphasize the importance of strategy and quick thinking in political life.

How is this value employed?

Diversions strategies are employed to plant doubt in the mind of the audience and make them question their leaders and the actions they take. When an audience member sees the lengths that strategists can go to in order to distract the public eye, he or she may think that the actual events within the plot are curious or too bizarre to actually happen, but they may also see that manipulation and media abuse is much easier and feasible in day to day political happenings than was once thought.

Contender (2000)

The Contender (2000) is an appropriate film to include in this study because the values present are represented from a feminist perspective. Congress subjects Lanie Hanson to verbal abuse because she is a woman nudged to be the next Vice-President. In order to gain this appointment she must endure Congressional hearings that function to determine whether or not she has the potential to be a great leader. The values present in this film are integrity and political strategy.

Integrity

How is this value identifiable?

Integrity is identified through Hanson's unwillingness to dignify unsubstantiated sexual transgression allegations from her past during her confirmation hearings. Charges surface during her hearings that suggest she had engaged in group sex while a freshman in college in order to meet the requirements to join a sorority. This is untrue and all of the evidence against her is fabricated. Since this allegation has nothing to do with her ability to govern she refuses to discuss them. She has a moral soundness that guides her decision to do the right thing for her

and women in general. She is asked to answer allegations that would not be an issue for a man and she knows that is the case.

How is this value emphasized?

As with many of the other films in this study, integrity is emphasized because it is missing in the actions of the other main characters. At the beginning of the film, Governor Jack Hathaway, is fishing under a highway overpass. Suddenly, a car jumps the guardrail and plunges into the water. Hathaway jumps in the water to rescue her but fails. He is deemed a courageous man in the film and is under consideration to be a contender for the Vice Presidency that had just been vacated due to an untimely death. Originally, this seems reasonable until it comes to light that the crash was planned. The car was supposed to crash into the water, and he was supposed to rescue the victim, however, the victim was not supposed to die.

The President wants to have a legacy left behind from his time in office and appointing the first female Vice President would accomplish that goal. Hathaway's stunt was all for nothing because the President wants to nominate a woman for the position. Senator Runyon is the head of the confirmation committee and he favors Hathaway for the position and will do anything to get him into office. Once it is clear that Hanson is the President's pick, Runyon, with help, fabricates a story about her sexual deviance in college. He had photos manipulated, forged testimony, and paid witnesses to lie.

How is this value employed?

Integrity is employed through the veracity shown by the President and his advisors to gain support for Hanson. Hanson could have given in at any moment, but decides to stick by her principles, even when they are problematic. Regardless of the endless evidence against her, the President and his top advisor stand by her. They are frustrated and want her to defend herself,

but they support her decision to stick to the issues that are directly related to the position she was to be appointed.

As the audience learns of Hanson's innocence they may feel aggravated at her decision to ignore any and all reference to her alleged sexual deviance. However, they may respect her decision, and by the end of the film she is rewarded for her decision to stay quiet. The President stands by her and asks Congress to confirm her appointment as Vice President after she had already stepped down from consideration.

Political Strategy

In *The Contender* (2000), political strategy plays an important role and it is a strategy of interference and interruption. However, it is not as prevalent as in many of the other films discussed in the study. In this film political strategy is used as a means to gain and to sabotage confirmation of a Vice Presidential appointment.

How is this value identifiable?

When we first meet the President in the film, we learn that he is interested in putting a woman into the position of Vice President. He is nearing the end of his last term and wants to leave a legacy, or a swan song as it was put in the film. This is a political strategy that is used for historical reasons, because he wants the history books to identify him as a progressive, forward thinking President. He does know that Hanson is a solid choice for the position, but chooses her primarily because she is a woman.

Governor Hathaway also utilizes political strategy, and it is iniquitous and sadistic. He planned the car to crash into the river while he was fishing with a witness. He planned on saving the young woman in the car, but fails and the woman dies at his hands. His strategy is to become an American hero in the eyes of his country so he would be appointed Vice President and have a

smooth confirmation. He gets his comeuppance because the administration does appreciate his “effort” to save the young woman, but does not want a situation reminiscent of Chappaquiddick. The President is trying to change the face of history by nominating a great leader into the office of Vice President. His strategy at this point is to avoid any and all controversy in his nomination process, and Governor Hathaway is a precarious choice.

Senator Shelly Runyon is the head of the confirmation hearing and he is a close friend of Governor Hathaway. When Hathaway is not chosen as the appointed Vice-President to be confirmed, Runyon begins his strategy. Runyon forges documents; manipulates photographs and grills Hanson during the confirmation hearings. He is ruthless and wants to make Hanson look like an incompetent whore who has no business in higher office, let alone as Vice-President.

Hanson uses the most significant political strategy of all of the characters. She chose to not dignify the sexual deviance allegations. She knows that it is beneath her to deny or discuss the charges at all. This is a brave decision because many feel that her silence is an admission of guilt. The only person she trusts with the truth was the President and that was only after the hearings were over and during a private moment.

How was the value emphasized?

Political strategy is emphasized by the sheer desperation all of the characters personified before and during the confirmation, all but Hanson. Runyon and his colleagues’ work relentlessly to manifest charges and other improprieties. There was a great deal of backroom dealings, money exchanged, and document forgery in order to make Hanson look like a morally corrupt person, and not worthy of higher office.

Hathaway’s maneuvers are also emphasized. His use of such unethical tactics is brought to light by a private investigator. He acts very desperately to gain this position and is punished

for it. This is an interesting turn of events and shows that Hanson is the better choice of the two potential candidates. This is a shrewd move by the President because Hanson had become an embarrassment to his administration due to the false charges against her and by publicly arresting Hathaway, everyone's first choice over Hanson; he proves that his first judgment was correct.

How was this value employed?

Political strategy is used to attest to the fact that many of the issues in the film are based on Hanson's gender. Hanson knows that she is being targeted because she is a woman and any man in her position would not have to answer for the same allegations. Hanson makes a difficult decision, but it was the right decision for her. She is fighting for the elimination of the double standard.

Summary

The values analyzed in this chapter are honor, integrity, democracy/patriotism, political strategy, and power. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) provides a framework to discuss the values present in all of the films, and this choice was made because it is one of the first political films made and is still considered to be timely in its illustration of political life. Each of the values named are present in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and are located in the other films. Three of the films are considerably similar to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* in that they contained the values listed to include honor, integrity, power, and political strategy. These films were significant because they emphasized traditional American values and political discourse to gain audience support and build a foundation for likable characters the audience may want to see succeed. *Mr. Smith*, *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), and *Primary Colors* (1998) have characters with redeeming values, and characters the audience could easily identify with and support.

In the case of *Wag the Dog* (1997) and *The Contender* (2000), the values stressed are scarce but strengthened the storylines they are depicting because the tone of both films are dark devoid of positive messages. *Wag the Dog* (1997) specifically offered minimal redeeming qualities or values, however, the plot was sinister and did not require audience support in order for the film to be successful.

In summary, my analysis clearly shows that political films reflect the political consciousness of society through the depiction of key American values. Generally speaking, in our culture, Americans tend to be wary of their political leaders, but for the most part they believe in the democratic and constitutional process. Americans are well aware of the fact that there are good and bad people seeking higher office and these films depict the process and how change results in both honesty and deception within the scheme of political events. .

Most of the films in this study clearly intend to have the audience look favorably on political life by the time each movie ends. The audience can see the protagonist's good win over the antagonist's evil in such films as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), and *The Contender* (2000). Citizens want to believe that the political process works and the best person for the job will succeed in the end. In *Wag the Dog* (1997), the instinct to mistrust and be wary of politics and the political process is substantiated. If every film had a fairy tale ending, moviegoers may desire a darker view of what may really happen in Washington. *Wag the Dog* (1997) allows the audience to think critically about the process and wonder just how much manipulation they endure by participating in a political process, or just by watching the evening news.

The consciousness of Americans is reflected through the values and the variations of appeals evident within these films. For every honorable action, the audience sees a dishonorable

action, and this is true of every value identified in the film. These films have a sense of verisimilitude, which makes them believable and realistic, and therefore, do reflect the political consciousness through the use of American values.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Political Implications of a Political Consciousness

In the previous chapter I discussed how political films, through their use of American values, reflected the political consciousness of society. In this chapter, I will answer the question: what are the political implications for this consciousness as evident in the conduct of political campaigns? Each of the six films, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000) have political implications past entertaining a mass audience. By political implications, I refer to the socio-political by-products or consequences generated by the conduct of politicians and their campaigns as depicted in these films. In order to answer this question, I explain several different elements of the political campaigns and actions in these films, and then illustrate how they function within specific scenes. The elements I have identified are, technology/media usage, political advisors, and products of time. I will discuss how these elements had a potential effect on society through their treatment in the various films.

Technology/Media Proliferation

Technology and media usage differ greatly from film to film. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) the most sophisticated equipment used is the telephone, telegram, newspapers, and radio. At one point in the film, Mr. Smith wants to test out his carrier pigeons so he can send messages home to his mother. When Mr. Smith comes under fire after his colleagues turn on him, newspaper and radio report his alleged misdeeds. The public is outraged at Smith's alleged behavior and to voice their opinions they send thousands of telegrams requesting his removal from office. However, newspapers do assist him as well. His Boy Rangers, at home in Montana, started running Smith's printing press to help clear Smith's name.

This differs from *The Candidate* (1972), because there were great technological advances in the 35 years that lapse between films. Bill McKay's primary difference is his television access. McKay announces his candidacy using the television medium, and he performs in television advertising, and televised appearances. While a candidate may flourish by using television some may wilt under the bright lights. Television works to McKay's advantage because he is young, photogenic and television reflects his charm. At the same time, however, television picks up his discomfort in front of people and his political inexperience. This behavior could have been problematic, but California's voters are portrayed as tiring of professional politicians. Thus, McKay's unease proves to blend well with his attractive appearance.

Viewers may see in the film that television also aided in the manipulative nature of the political campaign making edits and sound bites easy to manufacture. Editing works for McKay's campaign and angers him in the process because he wants to win on his own merit and not through the control of any manipulative advisors.

The film *Power* (1986) relies heavily on new technology to make campaigning easier and even more manipulative than we find in *The Candidate* (1972). Pete St. John is a creative and technical wizard who can make illusive images using video technology. He relies on techniques designed to make his clients attractive, and to tailor the illusions he sees as having persuasive power. St. John edits television advertisements to make his clients appear more attractive or to refute negative accusations.

St. John, however, does not use technology in the same way as McKay and his advisors. McKay moves through some purposeful moments that are orchestrated appearances and announcements that are televised. On the other hand, St. John's television ads are planned and executed exclusively by him. St. John plans his clients' appearances, and sets up their

advertisements. He even blocks the staging for the advertisements. For example he creates a unique western scene for Wallace Furmann, the candidate for governor of New Mexico. This scene was not an ordinary advertisement; but rather it is an elaborate production with many horses and riders. When the shoot goes awry, St. John uses his editing skills to make an advertisement that creates an illusion to show Furmann as a skilled rider who is comfortable as a New Mexico cowboy. The illusion could not have been further from the truth because awkward Furmann is thrown from a horse, because a skillful rider who appears like a western hero rides up to the camera. St. John was able to create that impression through computer editing and the medium of television. Another example of St. John's editing skills is when he responds to the character attacks on his client Andrea Stannard, running for Governor of Washington. Instead of using an ordinary advertisement to respond to the attacks, St. John takes an older ad and digitally enhances it by adding splashes of mud on to Stannard's face to illustrate that her opponent is a mudslinger, who cannot rely on his own campaign issues to win the election.

The primary plot of *Power* (1986) revolves around a large oil company financing the campaign of Jerome Cade. This team has plans of undoing all of the progress his predecessor, Sam Hastings, had made in environmental legislation. This was a corrupt operation from the beginning because Senator Hastings was forced out of office as a result of his wife's financial mess and the impending scandal she fueled. The oil company tempted Claire Hastings with loans to redecorate her home and the interest became too high to repay. In order to wipe the debt clean, Hastings made a deal with the oil company that resulted in his ultimate resignation under the deceptive excuse of failing health.

St. John agrees to represent Cade, but he got much more than a political client. The oil company wants to keep St. John on a short leash and they do so by wire tapping his office, home,

and any hotel room he was using. This was a new use of technology in political film and also demonstrates just how far some are willing to go in order to gain power. Electronic communication technology is quite important also in *Primary Colors* (1998).

The plotline of *Primary Colors* (1998) relies heavily on technology but not always as a tool used to win the office. In this film the audience sees the standard uses of television, radio, and the computer. However, in this film we see the emergence of cellular telephones including highly technical manipulations of cellular telephone conversations. Since much of the plot of *Primary Colors* (1998) revolves around Jack Stanton getting himself in trouble and his campaign team getting him out of trouble, it is no surprise that much of the technology present in this film would be used to either get him in or out of the precarious situations he finds himself.

Early in the film, Stanton is talking on his cell phone to his aid Henry Burton. He is having a memorable conversation about Thanksgiving and taking a break from the campaign. He invites Burton to the Governor's mansion for Thanksgiving dinner and discusses his plans for the time off. Not long after this conversation occurred a woman named Cashmere McLeod comes forward and admits to having an affair with the governor and has tapes to prove it. This is problematic for a variety of reasons, but the main reason is that Stanton did have an affair with her. After listening to the tape, Stanton has no recollection of the conversation and they take the tape to an audio expert. The expert can tell that there are serious breaks and cuts in the audio, so it had been fabricated. Once Burton hears the tape he recognizes it as his conversation with Stanton before Thanksgiving. Libby, a dear friend to the Stanton's and volunteer in the campaign, knows exactly who is responsible for the tape and confronts him with evidence and a gun to emphasize the serious nature of the visit. The man, who works for a national tabloid,

quickly makes a formal statement that he had manipulated a cell phone conversation and fabricated the tapes.

Daisy, an advisor for Stanton appears on *Larry King Live* to discuss the fabricated tapes, but went prepared. Stanton's staff recorded one of King's cell phone conversations. He was innocently making reservations for dinner and they manipulate the tape so it sounds like a tawdry conversation. They play it for King and he is shocked at how one can gain access to a cell phone conversation and then edit it to change the context of the call. This proves that Stanton did not have the conversation and therefore he escapes any embarrassment.

In *Wag the Dog* (1997), the audience sees a greater reliance on technology to forward the plot. In their need to create great distraction for the American public, Conrad Brean relies on Stanley Motss' producing skills, which involve the technology available to Hollywood. To produce the illusion of war with Albania much of the technology necessary was computer generated graphics. The image necessary to launch the war was a young girl, who was running through a burning village in Albania. In actuality, the young girl, played by Kirsten Dunst, runs through a sound stage holding on to a bag of potato chips. Stanley Motss and his assistants digitally add the burning village behind her and replace the bag of potato chips with a kitten. This is the most sophisticated use of technology the audience has seen in political films to date.

In *The Contender* (2000), technology is used to sabotage Laine Hanson's confirmation hearings for her appointment as Vice-President. Like *Wag the Dog* (1997), digital enhancements and manipulations are made to photographs and documents. In the film, Laine Hanson is nominated to be the next Vice-President. She has support, but she also has powerful opposition. Sheldon Runyon, still bitter after his loss to the President in the last election, is determined to

make her confirmation so difficult and grueling that she will either resign before it ends, or the committee will fail to support her nomination.

The only obvious controversy in Hanson's life is a recent party change. She was a republican Senator from Ohio and in her most recent election she changed her party to democrat and won. Many think of her as a traitor who cannot be trusted. That is the only thing that could have worked against her. However, President Evans' thinks that is an asset because no one can accuse her of being too liberal or progressive in his democratic administration. He needs a moderate in order to keep Congress and the public content.

Once Runyon learns that his first choice, Jack Hathaway, was not chosen he is furious and vows to ruin Hanson's chances of becoming the Vice-President. Runyon investigates Hanson's past and manipulates and exaggerates what could have been a scandalous secret, if it was true. He finds that Hanson was told that in order to join the sorority of her choice she would have to have sex with several fraternity boys at the same time. Hanson considered it, but decided it was a bad decision and did not participate. Runyon exploits this story and creates art to support his claims.

Runyon's assistant finds pictures of an orgy and digitally enhances the photos so it appears that the woman in the picture is Hanson. There are several photos and they appear authentic. The manipulation does not end there because Runyon also has forged statements that identify Hanson in the photos, along with sworn statements attesting to the events of that evening.

The photos and statements are leaked to the press and Internet sites and it is not long before the world believes that Hanson is a sexual deviant who should not be confirmed as Vice-President. Hanson refuses to dignify the allegations throughout the entire confirmation process

and the audience is lead to believe that all of the documents and statements are true and Runyon is just a ruthless person for digging up this rubbish after 25 years. Later the truth is revealed after Hanson confides in the President about the actual events of that evening.

The technology used to discredit Hanson was sophisticated and the product was convincing. Tabloids enhance photos everyday in order to convince the public of scandalous stories. We do not consider the repercussions of this kind of behavior when it pertains to our sworn leaders, but the audience can be led to believe that it actually happens amongst all of the other corruption that occurs in politics daily.

The political implications of technology in these films stress the importance of access in political life. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the corrupt Senators want access to more money through the use of the Willett Creek Dam and frame Smith for their crime. More money equals more power. In *The Candidate* (1972) McKay is subject to manipulation through the use of technology, but not as severely as many of the other characters in the other films. By him winning the election he gains power that the others around will use him for access. In *Power* (1986), the most desperate examples of power hungry politicians are evident. The oil company funding Cade's run for senate does so to gain access to influence Congress. By accessing a Senator they may influence the legislation involving the use of fossil fuel. In *Primary Colors* (1998), much of the technology use revolves around Cashmere McCloud sabotaging Stanton's campaign to gain money. If she sells the manipulated tape to tabloids she can make money and earn her fifteen minutes of fame. In the film *Wag the Dog* (1997), the technology used attempts to create the illusion of war to divert American attention away from the allegations of the President's sexual misconduct. Manipulation and enhancement is also the sole purpose of the technology usage in *The Contender* (2000). Runyon wants his candidate, Jack Hathaway, to take

the Vice President's seat and he would then have access to higher office and more power, perhaps.

Political Advisors

Political consultants and advisors play an integral role in many of the films in this study. The plotlines of *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998) and *Wag the Dog* (1997) rely on quick thinking and smooth talking of political operatives in order to make the story interesting and forward the notion of manipulative politics in everyday life. However each film has a version of the political advisor that emerges as the story line progresses.

The plotline of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) relies on audience support for newcomer Mr. Smith against his malevolent colleagues more so than an understanding of how politicians get and stay elected. However, the audience does see the development of political advising in Smith's Congressional assistant, Ms. Saunders. Saunders is quite wary about Smith when she first meets him and she does not see any potential for greatness in Smith. Moreover, she knows in advance that he is supposed to be used as a puppet to further the agenda of the political bosses and those Senator's who have sold out to them previously. Saunders labels Smith a simpleton who she sarcastically refers to as Daniel Boone because of his love of the outdoors and the reputation of an adult boy scout that precedes him.

Saunders had lost her idealist faith in the political system long ago and is very leery of anyone who comes to Washington with the façade of naivety. She does not trust Smith at first, but his boyish charm and earnestness eventually wins her over. She is saddened by the plans Smith's colleagues have for him, but at first she plays along. When Paine, Smith's senior Senator, learns of Smith's plans to draft a bill reserving Willett Creek for a boy's camp he constructs a plan to divert Smith's attention away from their plans to dam the creek. Paine asks

Saunders to distract Smith and also puts his daughter in charge of showing him the town on the day the bill was to be presented.

Saunders begins to regret her position even more now that Smith is being duped in the process. Her growing affection for Smith forces her to resign her position and she leaves Washington. She was not gone for long however, and upon her return she finds Smith drowning in sorrow after Paine calls for Smith's resignation from the Senate on false charges. He feels his country is betraying him along with so many people he trusted. Saunders hates to see Smith in pain, and she devises a plan to help him fight the charges. This is when Saunders becomes a political advisor in the film.

Saunders is in an interesting position of power now because she can help Smith unbeknownst to his adversaries. Acting as a Congressional assistant for several years allowed her to observe how the system works and how the system can be manipulated. She knows that Smith is innocent and also knows that anyone who gets to know Smith would realize that as well. She helps Smith plan a filibuster, understanding that the Senate would realize that an innocent man would not go to this much trouble. Saunders coaches him from the gallery and tells him to read from the *Constitution, Declaration of Independence* and any other long reference book that would restore faith in him and the democratic process.

Her plan is even more successful than either she or Smith had hoped. Not only is Smith cleared of all charges, but also Paine admits to having falsified the charges against Smith and confesses to having fallen to temptation and greed. In the end, Saunders revived in Smith, the faith he had given her. It was an appropriate ending for a film intended to feature honesty and truth as democratic values.

The plot of *The Candidate* (1972) revolves around the notion that no one can get elected on merit alone, they must surrender to the authority of the political operative. The advisors, consultants and operatives in *The Candidate* (1972) have a special job; they must create an image of a candidate who initially appears hesitant to be elected. He grew up as the Governor's son and found out early that politics was not the life for him. McKay does want to make a difference but he does so by running a legal aid clinic to help the underprivileged people in Southern California.

Marvin Lucas is the professional operative in charge of the campaign. In the first scene of the film the audience sees a candidate giving a concession speech and the film cuts to Lucas talking to another man about the next election and finding a winnable candidate. Lucas has a newspaper photo of Bill McKay and the story is about a young man working hard to make a difference, and they do so under the pretense that he is former Governor, John J. McKay's son. They figure with his name and visibility they may be able to make a candidate out of him.

Lucas approaches McKay at the legal aid clinic and very subtly catches his attention by calling him Senator. Lucas can tell that McKay is listening but he will not give him an inch of room to move. They discuss Crocker Jarmon, and the state of affairs in California, but Lucas can see that McKay is not happy with the way things are working, however he does say that he is just happy making a real difference in small ways. Lucas traps McKay when he needs a ride home after his wife does not bring the car to him. Lucas offers him a ride, and while visiting McKay's home, Lucas makes him an offer he does not refuse; if he runs for senate he can run it his way and lose. The audience may not understand why he would run if he is going to lose in the end, however McKay has made a career out of making small differences. If he runs he can raise public awareness that there are attractive choices out there and perhaps he can pave the way for

another progressive candidate who can win in the next election. McKay has the support of his wife Nancy because she believes that he would make a great candidate. This belief coupled with a disappointing encounter with Senator Jarmon is enough to convince him to run.

Lucas and his operatives are smart and they know that telling him he will lose can get the man in the door, and after a while they can turn him into a winnable candidate and they do. McKay begins the election with great conviction and ideals. However, it is not long before he begins to speak politically, skirting the issues, and playing politics in a manner that would make his father proud. For example, Lucas holds practice sessions with McKay so they can tape an interview, play it back and show him where he can improve. They ask his opinion on abortion rights and he very clearly states that he agrees with legalizing abortion because every woman has the right to choose. Lucas tells him that he cannot say that, he has to say that he is studying the issue. He begins using avoidance as a strategy when answering tough questions regarding unions, healthcare, welfare and the economy. Bill McKay sells his soul to his political operatives and this causes him to lose his way but win the election.

Two flashes in the film define McKay's resistance and surrender to his consultants. The first occurs when McKay's debates his incumbent opponent; he was chastised for getting too far off message. Occasionally, McKay finds opportunity to speak from his heart about what the State of California needs and regardless of how deep into the campaign he is he tends to take that chance to speak his mind. However, his campaign team is never pleased with him and goes into damage control immediately after McKay's various speaking engagements. His fall to the consultants occurs after his father makes a deal with the Teamsters. McKay loathes the organization because of their lack of support for farm workers and yet he allows his father to broker the deal in order to gain their support. The McKay that the audience met at the beginning

of the film would never have agreed to such a deal, however he is in this campaign so deep, he cannot come up for air. In fact, after his primary win Lucas informs him that it is crunch time and he needs to really get out there and campaign because if he does not, he will be humiliated in the general election. McKay's response is, "you make it sound like a death sentence."

After all of the hard work and after McKay loses his way, they find out that he won anyway. The public voted for him because he has a young attractive face, and he was a viable candidate. McKay cares about the voters of California and wants to make their state a better place for them to live and he finds out that they voted for him because he was cute. The audience can take comfort in the fact that after all of the hard work, the man with the ideals in the beginning won the election in the end. McKay is not so sure however, he has avoided so many issues, and changed his platform so many times his final words in the film are, "what do we do now?"

In the film *Power* (1986), the importance of political consultants is emphasized again but in a different context. Now the audience sees the life of a consultant from his point of view. Pete St. John is known for getting candidates elected. He uses successful political strategies and is not afraid to take chances with his clients. He will change their appearance, create an illusion of competence, and stage scenes for the public to gain insight on the candidate and their views.

Pete St. John however, has allowed his career to take over his life. His greed and obsession with work caused him to lose his wife and all of his friends. The only people in his life are his clients. In the film, his ex-wife, Sydney, is still a constant in his life and under the pretense of her career, a journalist; she tries to help St. John learn the error of his ways.

St. John has the reputation of only being loyal to money and it has caught up with him. Most of the strategies he uses with his clients are for the most part harmless but he has found

himself in a precarious situation. After he unknowingly takes on an oil company he finds himself in danger. His phones are tapped, and he is run off the road by a semi truck. He knows that something is happening, but he is not sure what or why.

He soon learns that he is a pawn in a game played by very high rolling oilmen, who make it clear that they do not want to lose. St. John understands that his reputation is how he got into this situation, because it was understood that he does not care who his clients are as long as they can afford him. Beside his ex-wife, the only friend he has is Senator Hastings and he has worked hard during his tenure to vote for legislation that helps the environment, supports solar energy, and decreases dependence on fossil fuel. His replacement wants to reverse all of the good Hastings accomplished and Hastings is supporting him. St. John is suspicious of everything at this point and supports Sydney's investigation into Hastings' life. This is when the oil scandal is revealed.

St. John's methods are manipulative and devious thus, he leads a personally unfulfilling life. Once he sees the damage his kind of campaigning can do, he tries to adjust his lifestyle and help those candidates who may be the best people for the job. This film does not paint a flattering picture of political consulting. The message in this film is that you can win if you can afford it.

Primary Colors (1998) illustrates a picture of political campaigns that utilize different kinds of political advisors and consultants. This is the largest campaign effort in this study and many more would be necessary for this kind of a campaign. Each one has a specific job description or strength, but each of them will stop whatever they may be doing to help clean up Stanton's mistakes. Cleaning up after Stanton is the primary job of each of his advisors, including his wife.

Stanton's consultants are not working in this campaign to gain wealth, glory, or power as in the others films. They are all political romantics trying to support who they hope is an ideal candidate. Despite all of Stanton's flaws, they have never met anyone who relates to the public so empathically. He feels what they feel, and understands what it takes to make the country a better place than when he started campaigning. His consultants become frustrated and tired, but with every setback, they confront the problem and forge ahead trying to be stronger than they were. Consultant Richard Jemmons, played by Billy Bob Thornton, tells Henry Burton that he suffers from TB, or true believerism. Jemmons believes in Stanton but is raw from the process, Burton is young and inspired to make a difference and he feels he can do that if he helps Stanton get elected.

Burton befriends Libby, an older and wiser friend to the campaign, and she is such a political romantic that when her candidate turns out to be less than decent, she loses touch with reality. When she enters the film she had just been released from a mental facility. She is not ready for a real campaign and her disappointment in Stanton and the "do whatever it takes to win" attitude eventually gets the best of her and she takes her own life.

This film is an interesting commentary on the well meaning, good hearted political consultants that work in campaigns everyday. There are many advisors and operatives who operate as St. John and Lucas do in *Power* (1986) and *The Candidate* (1972). *Primary Colors* (1998) however, has consultants who are in the campaign for the love of Stanton and the need to help a good person become President. Stanton's advisors function much more like Ms. Saunders does in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

Wag the Dog (1997), however illustrates the devious and deceitful characteristics of political consultants and advisors as we have seen in the other films in this study. This film does

not involve a campaign, but how advisors function after the campaign is over and problems arise. Brean and Motss act as spin doctors who manipulate the American public through the media. After a sex scandal story hits the airways, Brean's immediate response, as a hired spin doctor is, "to change the story, change the lead." Stanley Motss, the Hollywood producer played by Dustin Hoffman, is in charge of this mass deception. He becomes the chief consultant at this point and Brean, and the other Washington consultants follow his lead.

Motss has a creative mind and an unyielding spirit in this war production and he puts an interesting spin on the preconceived notion of political consultant. His primary objective is pulling this illusion of war off without a hitch. The President's need to get out from underneath this scandal is secondary to Motss' need to make this war a reality. He pulls out all of the stops while working on this, and it pays off because the illusion is a success.

The implication in this film is the America that is painted in this picture is dim and gullible, especially those affiliated with the media. This is not a realistic portrait because anyone who watches the evening news understands that each news organization has watch dogs and gate keepers waiting for politicians to stumble. If reporters can find errors in word usage, they would most certainly discover a fabricated war.

Political consultants concern themselves with image and how their client appears because they know that appearance is everything. They change client's outward and inward appearance as well as tailor their way of speaking and what they speak about. Motss is concerned with image in this film, because he is constructing the image of war. This film may not fit into the same subgenre of political film as *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), or *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), however, they are alike in that each of the films is creating and/or maintaining a particular image that is imperative to the candidate, client, or American public.

The Contender (2000) uses political advisors and assistants but in a dissimilar manner to the films studied thus far. Since the primary plot of this film revolves around sabotaging a confirmation hearing we see an even more devious kind of advising and assisting. Sheldon Runyon, Hanson's primary opposition, is leading a witch hunt against a person who could become the first female Vice-President. He tells his advisors and assistants that they are aiding in an assassination, but a character assassination, because a woman has no potential for greatness.

In order to pull off the assassination Runyon orders his assistants to find out everything about Hanson, good and bad. When they find her past to be free of dirt and scandal, they take a pseudo-scandal and make it real. His assistants manipulated photos, paid off "witnesses" and attacked her character violently during the confirmation hearing. This is an example of politics at its worst and most desperate. Runyon is so desperate to keep Hanson out of the Vice President's office and his candidate, Jack Hathaway in office that he initiates the most violent character assassination. Runyon and his assistants say that they must "gut this bitch in the belly."

Hanson has an impressive support system, but it is without professional consultants. The President, Chief of Staff, and her husband support her endeavors and her need to remain professional and dismiss the negative allegations against her. Runyon and his assistants fight a tough battle and lose. Hanson's strongest supporter is the President and he handles her confirmation with grace and ease, while keeping Hanson's dignity in tact.

This film differs greatly from the other films in the study in terms of consultants and assistants. Assistants are used in an unflattering portrait of American politics. The President

comes to Hanson's rescue and allows her to prove on her own and under her conditions whether or not she has the potential for greatness.

Products of Time

The time period in which these films take place plays an important role in the political implications and byproducts they create. The age of these films is taken into consideration because they reflect the social reality of the era in which they were made. With each passing year Americans become more cynical about politicians and the political establishment. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is the oldest film, made in 1939 and despite the corrupt characters; it features an honest hero who succeeds in the end. Indeed, the audience can easily identify the good and evil characters. As we see these films progress throughout the years, there is a shift as the line begins to blur between the decidedly decent characters and those who are dubious as in *The Contender* (2000) and *Wag the Dog* (1997).

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) illustrates the importance of big party bosses. These were typically men who hand picked candidates who could prove beneficial if elected. Jim Taylor, the party boss, is a tycoon and publisher who manages the political actions of Senator Joseph Paine, Mr. Smith's senior Senator. It is in Taylor and Paine's best interest to keep the Willett Creek Dam bill afloat and once Mr. Smith threatens the safety of that bill, they try to eliminate him.

In the 1970s they reformed party rules and they no longer rely on party bosses. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) party bosses and power brokers run the entire show and of course this is unbeknownst to Smith. Once they try to eliminate Smith, Taylor's newspaper business almost buries him in allegations of illegal activities and fraud. The corrupted Senators have access to biased newspaper coverage due to their previous sell out to Taylor.

The audience does see Smith's idealist views of his country shine through the corruption. This was typical of a Capra film; the happy ending is revealed but only after the audience suffers through the corruption and the filibuster. The audience can walk away from the film feeling good about the film and the state of American politics. This is indicative of the time period in which the film was produced. Americans wanted to believe in their leaders and trust that many more were like Smith, than like Paine.

The Candidate (1972) reflects a much more cynical social mood than that of what *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) illustrates. This film was made in the early 1970s amidst great social upheaval. Young people were standing up, or sitting in for what they believed in and older, out of touch politicians were not meeting their standards. Bill McKay represents the young progressive idealist that many longed to be in a position of leadership. They portray McKay as a private citizen with California's best interest in mind. Crocker Jarmon is portrayed as a career politician who only cares about his own interests and keeping his comfortable seat in Congress.

Marvin Lucas, the primary operative in the film, sees that the typical politician is no longer marketable or electable. He knows that he must find a new kind of candidate that speaks to the hearts and minds of the young voters of California. This is another sign of the times. In the 1960s and 1970s young people were getting involved in social issues like civil, and women's' rights and the environment. These issues required action from politicians in order to ensure results; thus, young people got involved. Crocker Jarmon dismisses the environment and makes no mention of civil rights. Jarmon represents the old school of politics and McKay represents the new more progressive side of politics. This film is progressive and a result of the many movements of the era in which it was made.

Power (1986) does not promote any social agenda, however the 1980s, the decade in which the film was made, may be characterized as a decade of greed and winning at all cost. Everyone wanted more of what they had, and more was never enough. Pete St. John was no different, he lived a deceptive and hedonistic lifestyle and he only had his own best interest at heart. He does care to help others; he wants his candidates to get elected in order to keep his reputation intact and continue to obtain more clients, which translates into more money.

This is the first film in the study to illustrate a palpable lack of social conscience. *Mr. Smith* (1939) and *The Candidate* (1972) both show great compassion for the welfare of their potential constituencies. In *Power* (1986), St. John has an obvious disregard for the voters because he only wants to create an electable, approachable candidate who appears to be the best person for the job. St. John does eventually gain perspective and begins to understand that in order to be treated fairly and prevent manipulation he must do business differently. Fortunately, the audience does get to witness a change in St. John's attitude but not before the greedy attitude of the time period shines through.

Primary Colors (1998) is an illustration of the political mood of the 1990s. This film takes place in an era of mistrust and probing media outlets. The 1990s began America's astounding access to 24 hour news and around the clock news updates. A politician cannot have a head cold without it being reported; therefore every candidate is under intense scrutiny by both the media and the American public.

There was a time when politicians were considered private citizens and their personal lives were personal. The media protected their privacy and only reported on actual political news involving domestic and foreign relations. By the time *Primary Colors* (1998) was released Americans had witnessed political corruption and personal scandals involving elected officials

and candidates therefore, candidate were always under investigation, professionally and personally.

Jack Stanton becomes a victim of this relentless probing and after watching the film the audience may wonder how he could have ever been elected because his views on political issues are overshadowed by the coverage of his personal indiscretions throughout the duration of the film. This is another symptom of the era in which the film was made. The media is continually investigating candidates, following up on claims and breaking into the regularly scheduled programming to tell the public what the latest damaging story is and how it effects the election and polling results.

In the same vein as *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (2000) attempts to stay one step ahead of that constant probe of the media. The advisors of this administration understand from experience how damaging bad press can be, so they in turn try to trick the media and the American public through distraction and diversion. This film gives a cynical glimpse into the high tech, 24 hour news world of the 1990s. Once an allegation is made the accused is guilty until proven innocent, therefore these advisors decide to change the headline and force the public to forget about the allegations, at least until the election is over and the President is reelected.

This film also uses technology, as previously mentioned in this chapter, to pull off this great illusion and indicative to the time period, the advisors and the media are in a race to see who can get their story on quicker. If Brean and Motss move too slowly they risk creating a lull in the constant flow of war coverage and the story of the President's sex scandal may reenter the top news story of the evening. The speed and ability of the technology in this film plays a large role in the storyline and emerging technology such as high speed internet and wire services,

along with the sophisticated editing equipment used to create the illusion of war, aid in illustrating the importance of time period to define the political implications present in this film.

The Contender (2000) is a film that depicts the regressive nature of the social mood of the new millennium. This film was released in 2000 and its primary theme is that a woman, specifically Lanie Hanson, does not have potential for greatness in the executive branch of government. This film provides evidence that the American public is still hesitant to allow a woman in a position where she has direct access to the leader of the free world, let alone actually claim that title, despite the fact that women have already been allowed entrance to every other branch of the government.

Morally corrupt characters take center stage in this film because many are threatened by the thought of a powerful woman having access to the most powerful legitimate position in the world. In an attempt to sabotage Hanson's confirmation hearing, characters such as Sheldon Runyon act in a deceitful and conniving manner to disrupt the progression of this hearing.

Whereas many people may not be ready to accept Lanie or any woman in the executive branch, this film accurately depicts the modern era because this is a polarizing issue and this is apparent in the telling of this story. It was evident that many, including President Evans and his Chief of Staff Kermit Newman, played by Sam Elliott, confidently endorse Hanson and the idea of a woman in high office. It is unfortunate that the person with the most power in this situation happened to be the most sexist and completely opposed to the idea of Hanson as Vice-President.

Summary

The technology/media usage, political consultants, and the time period in which the films were made define the political implications or social consequences of the films in this study. With each film there was an increased dependency on technology and the media. Each campaign

required cooperation from the media in the form of radio, television, and newspapers. In some cases such as *Mr. Smith* (1939) and *Primary Colors* (1998), and *The Contender* (2000) campaigns or politicians suffered due the intense media coverage, but at the same time the media was necessary to disseminate the messages of the campaign. With each film the sophistication of technology aided in campaigning both justly and unjustly. In the films technology was used to manipulate a campaign and or sabotage an opponent. Both the media and technology was used for good and evil.

Political consulting is big business in the political world. Every film had some version of a consultant. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *Primary Colors* (1998) illustrated good hearted consultants and advisors who helped their candidates and/or friends because it was the right thing to do. In other cases such as *Power* (1986), *The Candidate* (1972), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000) political advisors and consultants are depicted as greedy and selfish with no intention of helping anyone but themselves.

The time period in which these films were made illustrated just how much has changed over the 61 years that lapsed between *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *The Contender* (2000). *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* gave audiences an idealist view of politics, yes there were evil and malicious characters, but they were defeated by Smith's idealism. This notion became less and less apparent in each of the next five films.

The Candidate (1972) portrays a man who wants to help his state and tackle the important issues but lost his way and became just another ineffectual candidate through the political process. The social upheaval of the 1970s is evident in the social issues discussed such as civil rights, the women's movement and environment. There is also a mistrust of government, and especially old government that is apparent in the film.

Power (1986) illustrates 1980s greed and depicts success at any cost as a necessity and the price one must pay for that success. *Primary Colors* (1998) is a solid example of how news organizations became such a large part of the campaigning process because of the advent of the 24 hours new channels. Candidates such as Jack Stanton must have a love/hate relationship with the press because they can help a candidate just as much as they can hurt a candidate because of their need to fill 24 hours of news. They have reporters investigating everything past and present.

The news organizations also fueled the storyline in *Wag the Dog* (1997). Since the evening news will report on everything from foreign relations to the President's hangnail, the President's consultants know that they have to create a diversion to distract the media and the American public away from the latest sex scandal. They are in a race with the media and if there is a pause in the war reports, they will resume coverage of the sexual misdeeds of the President.

The Contender (2000) has a much different relationship with time than did the rest of the films. This is a film that deals with women in politics and what a woman's rightful place in politics really is. The characters in this film do not want to discuss social issues, nor do they want to discuss whether or not Lanie Hanson is the right person to be Vice-President. This film is about whether or not Lanie Hanson is the right woman for the job. Hanson's opposition decides that a woman does not have the potential for greatness and therefore they will not confirm her nomination for Vice-President. This was one of the first political films of the new millennium and the political implications of this film were strongly stated. This country is still divided on whether or not a woman should reside in the executive branch of office.

Technology/media, political consultants and the time period in which the films were made are the social byproducts of these political films. The sophisticated nature of technology and the emergence of 24-hour media outlets determine how the campaigns play out in society.

Political consultants, advisors and operatives decide how campaigns are managed, and how the candidate appears (i.e. attractive, competent, etc.). The time period is indicative of the social mood of the era in which the film was made. *The Candidate* (1972) has an undertone of social turmoil. *Power* (1986) is reminiscent of greed and wealth, while *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) is an idealistic, feel good film with a powerful political significance. These elements shape our society and exist as political implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This reviews how the political films in this study, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000), function rhetorically, how the depiction of values reflects political consciousness in society, and what the political implications of the films are.

This study suggests that political films do indeed function rhetorically by reflecting a political consciousness that go beyond the films themselves. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) initiates a definition of political films, and it is hallmark for this study because it mirrors the federal political establishment, from the malicious corruption of the political bosses and those who sold out to him, as well as the naïve young Senator who feels an overwhelming sense of pride and honor to be appointed into this position.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) creates a shared meaning of what political life means and the types of sacrifices real people must make everyday in order to have the honor of being included into that life. For example, in order to contest the fraudulent charges against him, Mr. Smith fights relentlessly to clear his name. Others might have walked away, giving in to defeat, but Mr. Smith believed that walking away was an admission of guilt and that his supporters deserved the truth.

This film functions rhetorically through its dramatic message of political life. Films can easily portray politicians as inherently corrupt, power hungry people, who care only about themselves and use their constituency to gain influence. This film illustrates those kinds of politicians, but it also argues for the benevolent politicians who work to help their constituency and want only good government to come from their efforts. The argument is supported by the

behavior in Smith, Saunders, and the President of the Senate. Those who view this film can walk away feeling as if they saw an authentic representation of political life. My assumption is that generally audiences do want to believe in the idea of the redeeming hero, and dismiss the reign of the malicious antagonist.

This film also uses values to reflect a political consciousness. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) the audience witnesses honor, integrity, democracy/patriotism, political strategy, and power. These values were used to describe the political mood of the era.

American's want to believe in solid value appeals and hope their leaders do as well. This film embodies political values and created a framework to study the value depictions in other films.

Every film to some degree has political implications or consequences that go beyond the scope of the film and this is especially true of political films. In this study, these consequences fall under the guise of media/technology, political consultants and products of time. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) is again an ideal example how these consequences are represented. This film relies on the authenticity of the 1930s technology and media sophistication. The newspapers and telegram service contribute to the intensity of the plot. Mr. Smith is intimidated by the power of the press and their ability to prove him guilty without a trial. This notion is cemented by the sheer number of telegrams received to condemn his alleged actions. Ms. Saunders proves to be the ideal political consultant after she masterminds the filibuster. The time period in which this film was released demonstrates the political mindset of the era. After the depression many were suspicious of their leaders but still respected their authority. In this film the audience can see leaders to dislike and those who deserve trust and support.

The Candidate (1972) depicts a much different type of political situation. Yet this film still functions rhetorically to further the understanding of political campaigns and depicts value

appeals that reflect a political consciousness, which has political implications beyond the scope of film. *The Candidate* (1972) helps to illustrate the notion that political candidates are mass produced through the use of political consultants and then this production is disseminated to the public through the media.

The Candidate (1972) also illustrates many of the same value appeals, as did *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). The audience sees representations of honor, integrity, and political strategy. McKay possesses each of these values as a candidate. He is honorable and has strong convictions. He has a subtle political strategy that he is unaware of, his naïve approach to politics helped him get elected.

Bill McKay loses his progressive, idealist agenda through the careful manipulations of his consultants. They take his words and change their meanings through editing devices and careful planning. The time period in which this film takes place is evident in the issues addressed as part of McKay's platform. He supports women's rights, bussing to desegregate schools, welfare, and the environment. These were among the issues during the 1972 campaign, and the issues are reflected in this film.

Power (1986) is the first film to provide a complete narrative of the role of a professional political consultant. Pete St. John embodies the greedy self centeredness of the stereotypical 1980s. He is power hungry just as his clients are. The film also functions to further strengthen the notion that the images of candidates are constructed for television viewers. *The Candidate* (1972) introduces that supposition, but *Power* (1986) really cements that notion.

The values present in this film are honor, integrity, political strategy and power. Honor and integrity are emphasized primarily through St. John's lack of honor and integrity. However, as Hollywood would have it, he has a change of heart toward the end of the film and reflects a

social conscience. These values begin to appear slowly. However, St. John is a master of political strategy with a reputation that he can get anyone elected through his shrewd political tactics and strategies. Power is obviously an important value in this film. St. John's clients crave power and they know that power will allow them access to many places and things. They will have money and influence and the respect of many people. St. John's primary objective is to make more money and more money translates into more power. Late in the film St. John learns a difficult lesson about the price of power and that leads to his change in attitude.

Primary Colors (1998) paints an interesting picture of primary politics in the mid 1990s. This was an adaptation of Bill Clinton's 1992 bid for the White House and it has all of the scandal, suspense, and victory that one would expect from the former President. As the other films have helped audiences understand and define the political establishment, this film on the other hand, creates an understanding on how one specific part of the campaign operates and the importance of that part.

The values evident in *Primary Colors* (1998) are honor, integrity, and, political strategy. The audience sees these values demonstrated in a variety of ways and primarily through the actions of his consultants and advisors. They were usually trying to clean up after Stanton's mistakes and developing the strategies that are necessary to diminish the problems and refocus the attention on his successes.

Media/technology, political consultants, and the time period are important elements required to discuss the political implications of this film. Investigative media became pervasive during the 1990s and placed the personal lives of all public figures in the living rooms of the American people. This causes trouble for any public figure that does not have a pristine past. If a candidate did something wrong twenty years ago, it will be revealed during the campaign. This

film illustrates the significance of this development. Instead of focusing on the issues, Stanton is forced to reconcile all of his past indiscretions.

These past indiscretions implicate technology, media, political consultants, and the time period of the film. The sophistication of technology allowed his opposition to frame him unfairly. The advent of 24-hour news organizations makes any news story, great or small, newsworthy and politicians and candidates are always newsworthy. Reporters follow candidates in order to discover newsworthy events and this again causes problems for Stanton and his fault filled past. Stanton's advisors and consultants have to develop strategies to do damage control for Stanton rather than actually work on the issues of the campaign.

The time period helps to define the political implications only because this film takes place long after the counter culture's mistrust of the government and a public need to know everything thing that happens within the lives of political figures. However, this mistrust may not be in the forefront of voters' minds, but it has become a ritual practice within political races. Candidates are often forced to have a love/hate relationship with the media.

Wag the Dog (1997) creates a shared meaning for the audience by forcing them to become more critical of the stories they are told by their leaders and the news media. The administration in this film fabricates a war to distract the attention away from a scandal. Americans learn of new political scandals everyday and there are new distractions in politics just as often. Are these distractions deliberate or coincidental? This film forces the issue further and may make the audience increasingly suspicious of their leaders.

The value this film depicts is political strategy because all of the characters become political strategists developing new ideas to continue the fabricated war long enough to get the

President reelected. The characters are constantly calculating the next move in careful detail. The lack of all other values appeals helps define the political implications of this film.

Media/technology makes this film possible because the media, along with the American people are pawns in this war game. The consultants in this film have access to the very best film equipment, including cameras, editing equipment and graphic generators, not to mention those technicians who can operate the equipment. This equipment allows for the illusion of this war to become a reality in the media. The consultant and advisors, Brean and Motss primarily, are in constant motion making all of the adjustments and reacting to every setback.

The time period of the film breeds similar consequences reminiscent to *Primary Colors* (1998). The 24 hour news organizations are quick and always need new stories and this is what necessitates the illusion of war to detract attention away from the sex scandal. Again, the political corruption of the 1970s made American's hyperaware of the actions of political figures and the media contributes a service to those suspicious Americans by providing every detail of a politician's life. Thus, the consultants are in a race to get war stories to the media before they can report on the sexual misconduct of the President.

The Contender (2000) provides an interesting commentary on the struggle of gender in politics. This film functions rhetorically to create the shared meaning that many are not willing to support the idea that a woman can be President, however it may very well happen sooner than later. Integrity and political strategy are the two most pervasive values appeals present in this film. Lanie Hanson is the Vice Presidential nominee and must undergo a grueling confirmation hearing. Regardless of the violent language and obscene accusations she must endure, Hanson resists the temptation to resign. She understands that she is the object of attack because she is a

woman; the country may not think they are ready for a woman in the executive branch, but she knows that she is ready, willing, and able to be an effective leader in that office.

Political strategy is emphasized through Hanson's ability to divert attention away from the alleged charges and focus on her political platform. Her opposition relies on manipulative tactics to shame Hanson and her bid for Vice President. A viewer can witness both the best and worst intentions when considering the use of political strategy in this film.

The political implications of this film place it right in the center of the feminist movement. Women have found success in two of the three branches of government but this film suggests that the country is not ready for a woman in the executive branch because of the dubious notion that a woman does not have the potential for greatness. This notion is furthered through the portrayal of media, technology, consultants and time period. Media/technology, and consultants or advisors are used primarily by Hanson's opposition. Runyon, her most venomous enemy, uses the media, editing technology, and his advisors and assistants to bring Hanson down. Hanson's consultants and advisors consist of the President, chief of staff and her husband. The strength of this union alleviates the need for any other type of advisor. The time period is interesting in this film because it was released at the beginning of the new millennium. Thirty years after the women's movement exploded into our culture, logic would deem the argument against women in politics obsolete. However, in the end Hanson does get confirmed at the hand of the President, so despite her opposition she is allowed the opportunity to prove she has the potential for greatness.

Political Reflection

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) has emerged as the cornerstone of this study and this occurred for two reasons. First, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* depicts several values that exemplify political reality, which place it as classic in film history. Other political films can only wish to have the same impact. Secondly, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* had real world impact.

Frank Capra Jr. (2000) discusses his father's success and controversy with the film and he states that Capra films are happy, inspirational tales of struggles with a fairy tale ending. They portray liberty and freedom using visual imagery like the Liberty Bell, The Washington Monument and The Lincoln Memorial as inspiration. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was no different.

Joseph P. Kennedy, the then ambassador to England tried to have the film banned in Europe because it portrayed United States politics as corrupt and he feared that the film would hurt U.S. and European relations. Harry Cohn, the studio executive, refused to bend because he believed the film was excellent. The American audiences embraced the film, and when the general public spoke, much of the controversy died (Keyishian, 2003).

The film did cause controversy after its release. The Press Corp in Washington gave it terrible reviews because they were highly offended at their portrayal. The press was depicted as drunkards who were rarely seen without a drink in hand. Capra Jr. (2000) recounted a story his mother had told him about the press and this disappointment. During the press preview of the film, Capra was booed and heckled by the press. There was a press dinner after the show and Capra asked if he should even attend after the dismay the press displayed during the film. He was told to go despite the press' disapproval of the film. One of the press members

went to Capra's table to express his extreme displeasure with the film and told the Capra's that the press did not consist of drunks. At that point he passed out onto their table.

Capra received several letters throughout the years from people who had seen *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and it inspired them to go into politics. The film showed for 30 straight days in Paris and Europeans loved the film. Many stated that the film showed the promise of democracy and gave many people hope for a better future. It was also popular in countries that longed for a democratic culture. It helped them to build a case for democracy and the betterment of their societies (Capra, 2000).

The film was based on a book titled, *The Gentleman from Montana*. This was well known at the time of release. While watching the film, the actual Senator from Montana left in the middle and scolded Capra for being disrespectful to the United States' Senate. He was not the only Congressman troubled by the film. Congress contacted Capra and Harry Cohn and threatened to punish Hollywood with legislation that would hurt the film industry (Keyishian, 2003).

These are just some of the real life controversies started by *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). It gives hope to the democratic system and helps audiences to perhaps continue to believe in the underdog. This film is American in more than just political plot. This country was founded on the belief that the underdog can win in the end. This is certainly true of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939).

The Candidate (1972)

The filmmakers of *The Candidate* (1972) knew that it was going to be released during an election year, specifically 1972. In order to make the film authentic in its portrayal of an election year the cast and crew traveled all over California and staged rallies, and parades and

interviewed the public to give the effect of a real Senate campaign. They also mirrored the political issues of the time in the film. They emphasized the environment, government aid and abortion among other subjects. These were all hot topics during the 1972 election year (*The Candidate*, 1972).

The cast and crew of *The Candidate* (1972) had Washington insiders helping them to make this campaign as real as possible. They knew that they were leaving some political professionals feeling a tad uneasy by releasing the film during the election. They contended that some of the scenes between McKay and Marvin Lucas should have been classified material. They were privy to so much of the inner workings of the political machine because Jeremy Lerner, who was a speechwriter for Eugene McCarthy, wrote the original screenplay, and he knew the ins and outs of campaigns. This attention to detail may explain why this film still receives great acclaim for its accuracy (Keyishian, 2003).

The Candidate (1972) turns a campaign into a political machine that takes over the lives of their candidates. The audience may get the impression that they cannot trust any of their candidates after watching this film, and may assume that all candidates become programmed robots at the hands of their advisors and do and say whatever it takes to win the election. Bill McKay's platform openly favors Welfare, Busing, and Abortion, but by the end of the election he is vague and aloof. He appears to be the victim of brainwashing and voters want a candidate they can trust and believe will act in the best interest of the constituency, not a robot that acts however his advisors wish.

Power (1986)

Power (1986) implies that the only thing that matters is winning and gaining power. Pete St. John is willing to do anything to make his client a winning candidate. The film portrays

political consultants as slippery and conniving and the audience may infer that this is an accurate portrayal. Even though the movie ends after St. John makes a moral transformation, the political establishment may still turn off the audience. There are still Pete St. John's out in the world who have not changed and will continue to manipulate candidates and voters. Voters and potential voters do not appreciate manipulation in any form and this film endorses that behavior for the first three quarters of the movie.

When audiences walk away from this film, they may begin to question everything they know to be true about their candidates. If a consultant is willing to exploit a terrorist bombing in South America, what will he not be willing to do? Pete St. John sold the voters a package, a neatly wrapped package that may not resemble the actual candidate at all. Bill McKay in *The Candidate* (1972) was an attractive candidate because of his lack of political savvy. This may be a sign that voters are getting tired of slick looking political candidates and want real people to run their country.

Toward the end of the film, when St. John started to doubt his consulting techniques, the audience had hope that perhaps real people may have a chance of winning elections on their own merit. Granted, Aarons did not win the election but he laid a foundation for a future win and it is conceivable that he could win with the help, not the manipulations, of the new and improved Pete St. John.

Before St. John's new found perspective, Aarons did not stand a chance of a second place finish. St. John helped him to promote his own platform despite his own advisor's advice. This again is a sign that voters want real people to choose from and not packaged candidates that evade the issues and promote their image over their concerns.

Primary Colors (1998)

Primary Colors (1998) is supposedly based on Bill Clinton's 1992 primary campaign and that makes it interesting and all the more significant, moreover, the film is based upon Joe Klein's novel, *Primary Colors*, which appeared under the authorship of Anonymous. *Primary Colors* (1998), the film, shifts the perspective because the audience is forced to see Stanton through the eyes of his supporters. The audience feels their pride, their success, their pain and failure throughout the entire film. Henry Burton is the focus of this shift. He longs for an inspired candidate that not only should win but also can win the election. When he joins the Stanton campaign he feels that he found that inspiration.

Burton is the last person to condone poor behavior and dirty tricks during a campaign and Stanton assures him that he will never have to be ashamed of this campaign. Yet, he is still asked to participate in cover-ups and other tricks. This pains Burton but he is still searching for a political hero in Stanton, so he continues.

The audience may be able to relate to Burton because he is in constant judgment of Stanton, as is the audience. The audience, like Burton, may find redeeming qualities in Stanton and feel that he is the best person to be President. They may also feel that he lacks the character required to be a good leader. The audience opinions are in a constant flux.

This film implies that one must make compromises in order to find an acceptable leader. *Primary Colors* (1998) allows the audience to realize that everyone is human and fallible. History has unfolded several misdeeds of Presidents past, however the general public was not privy to any of that information at the time. The press has become more intrusive in the lives of our leaders, so now we find out about the transgressions of candidates and Presidents, and most everyone believes that they have the right to know what happens in the lives of potential leaders.

Once the truth is out and the public finds out that very few candidates have perfect pasts, they learn that they are going to have to vote for the right person for the job, who has potential for greatness, and not how they conduct their personal lives.

Primary Colors (1998) also suggests that people, especially candidates are not perfect, and neither are their campaigns, but as Stanton says to Burton toward the end of the film, “This is it, Henry, this is the price you pay to lead. You don’t think Abraham Lincoln was a whore before he was a President? He would tell his little stories and smile his little shit-eating back-country grin and he did it just so that he would one day have the opportunity to stand in front of the nation and appeal to the better angels our nature.” In other words, candidates do what they have to do to get elected and promise to be good and upstanding once in office.

Wag the Dog (1997)

While *Primary Colors* (1998) was a biopic of sorts, *Wag the Dog* (1997) tells a different story that many believe to be all too true. The potential repercussions of this film are great because of the controversy that surrounded its release. Again, the plot focuses around a staged war to detract attention away from a sex scandal involving the President and a Firefly Girl. Since this alleged sexual misconduct occurs after the President is already in office, the film focuses more on mediated communication than the actual public and politician. The film also sells the idea that the general public will believe anything they see on television, the kind of public that believes everything they read in tabloids. If they see it on the news that the President has declared war on Albania, they are now at war with Albania. It is just that simple.

When this film was released Bill Clinton was in his second term in office and under scrutiny for alleged sexual misconduct with Monica Lewinsky. On the day that the Lewinsky story broke, Clinton opened an attack on supposed terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan.

Clinton's critics accused him of "wagging the dog," or using the bombings to detract attention from his transgressions.

This behavior, whether it was justified by intelligence or not, brings about mistrust in the country. Clinton had one of the most controversial presidencies in history with Whitewater, Paula Jones, and Gennifer Flowers; this just added more grist to the mill. The public felt that he was trying to lead the audience away from the Lewinsky story and worry them about potential terrorism from the Middle East. Since 9/11 the public may take any terrorist story more seriously, but much of Clinton's term was peaceful, the public did not have terrorists on the forefront of their minds.

The release of this film implied that if filmmakers can dream up such a story, politicians certainly can, and if they had not already they may very well do so now. If the films in this study have not already proven that politicians are tricky and manipulative, this film should eradicate any reservations one may have. Popular culture tells audiences that candidates will do anything to get into office and once in office, do anything to stay there and this film satirizes that notion.

The Contender (2000)

This film tackled many issues prevalent in feminist theory and criticism. Through the use of language and analysis of violent language, the film proved to have the rhetorical potential to challenge the status quo perspectives of women in politics. More films like *The Contender* (2000) are needed to begin the process of changing societal perspectives.

The film implies that despite the feminist movement, the country still does not want to believe in a woman in the executive branch of government. Her opposition fights vehemently to defeat her appointment and it is simply because she is a woman. No man in her position would have to defend himself so fiercely.

Hollywood has ensured a pleasant ending for these films, however one can certainly see the reality hidden behind all of the lights and glamour of the film's representation. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Candidate* (1972), *Power* (1986), *Primary Colors* (1998), *Wag the Dog* (1997), and *The Contender* (2000) interpret reality in both a pleasant and harsh manner, but unlike reality we got to see everything work out for the protagonist in the end. Mr. Smith triumphed over his colleagues' evil, Bill McKay won, although he had lost his way, Pete St. John found integrity, helped an underdog and the audience achieve hope for the future of politics, Jack Stanton won the presidency after he convinced the audience that one must do the wrong things for the right reasons, the Presidency remained in tact after "the war" ended in *Wag the Dog* (1997), and finally Lanie Hanson was appointed Vice President after an exhaustive, intrusive, and unjust confirmation hearing. These films help the audience to feel better about the poor choices candidates and politicians make throughout the films. Audiences may walk away convinced that candidates have to do the wrong things for the right reasons, despite their feelings of betrayal.

On screen candidates are typically likeable. For example, regardless of Stanton's misdeeds, everyone likes him. This is not always true of real life candidates however. After watching these films, voters may assume that the activities portrayed actually happen and may vote for the person who seems the least experienced, the least polished and genuinely seems to have the constituency's best interest at heart.

The protagonist in each of the films was portrayed as a real person and not a polished package. Mr. Smith was a down home country dweller who fell into power. He wanted to do good things for the people of Montana and eventually, after great struggle, he had the opportunity.

Bill McKay started off as a private citizen who felt he had no business in politics. After his advisors and consultants turned him into a real candidate, he won. The audience, however, may feel good about his win because they want the ordinary citizen with real convictions and concerns to resurface.

Jack Stanton had charisma, but it was natural. He did not have several consultants telling him what to do and when. He just naturally did it. He won because of his natural charm and ways of relating to real people, who need help.

Lanie Hanson also had natural charisma that made her a likeable character, and the audience may have wanted her to overcome her opposition. This film implied that good people might find resistance from unlikely sources. She had the President on her side, therefore she was able to overcome her opponent. The feminist critique is that since she is a woman, she has to fight much harder than a man to achieve the same appointment.

Wag the Dog (1997) informs the audience about just how manipulative politics can be. However, the satirical nature allows the audience to sit back and feel comfortable in the fact that this kind of thing would probably not happen. They may become more critical of the news coverage they encounter however.

The implicit connotation of these films is that negativity and manipulation runs this country and audiences are tiring of it. They want real people with a genuine concern from the people they want to represent. The days of showy politicians with million dollar consultants are far from over, however, many may long for that day to come.

The depiction of fictitious political situations in popular culture is becoming more pervasive in society. The popularity of television's *The West Wing*, and *Commander and Chief* signify that politics attract an audience. In fact, at the time this dissertation is being written,

Commander in Chief is a new weekly political drama that depicts a female in the title role. The timing of this film is noteworthy because the United States may be seeing a woman candidate for President with considerable support in the next Presidential election. News analysts even speculate that New York's junior Senator, Hillary Clinton is a front-runner for the democratic nomination for President in 2008. *Commander in Chief* has considerable rhetorical potential in its portrayal of a strong woman as the leader of the free world. She is a woman who is juggling Presidential responsibility as well as acting as a wife and mother with the same kind of problems women have everyday. Yet she is still able to act as President in an effective manner. This creates the mutual understanding that a woman can successfully run for President, win and run the country effectively. Analyzing this program's episodes in terms of rhetorical function and value judgment may help us to understand how society views a female President and if they may be susceptible to the idea in 2008 and perhaps vote.

Political films are important to study because they have the potential to influence mass audiences and generate a new understanding of the political establishment. Reflecting American values and determining the political consciousness to further understand the political implications, these films can help scholars learn more about the values people respect and how they view the consequences of political campaigns. Political films can also illustrate that art can mirror life, as well as predict it.

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