

PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING POLITICS IN 1952. Prepared by Paul T. David, Malcolm Moos and Ralph M. Goldman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1954. 5 vols. \$17.50.

THIS five volume work, dealing with the singularly important problem of the presidential nominating process in the United States, covers an area of political science that has never been adequately studied. The Republican and Democratic national conventions produce, amidst the beer cans and confetti, policies which have always intimately affected the lives of all Americans and which in our almost bifurcated world influence the destinies of all men. Even more important, the conventions select the candidates. Despite the often amazing similarity between parties and programs, the President's office is one of such strength that even minor policy differences assume major proportions when projected on the national and international stages. And the man chosen to run for President may be directly responsible for the victory or defeat of his party in a nation where voters frequently emphasize personality rather than principle.

Study of the national convention, as the tangible acme of the American leadership selection process, is a common meeting ground not only for political scientists, but also for students of international relations, economics, history, sociology, and psychology. All of these fields are concerned with aspects of human behavior which affect or are affected by convention dynamics. And knowledge such as this, produced by one discipline, must inevitably interact with the others.

These volumes marshal a greater mass of data on this segment of the democratic political process than has ever before been systematically gathered and evaluated. The first volume, entitled *The National Story*, presents a history and an analysis of the nominating procedure, the pre-convention behavior of candidates and party leaders in 1952, and the national conventions of that year. It also includes examination of delegate selection in the separate states and "discussion of issues that seem to be inherent in proposals for major changes in the present arrangements . . ." <sup>1</sup> The four following volumes deal with the delegations of both parties in the forty-eight states, Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In addition to general background material on each state, the "story"—often more readable than fiction—begins with the method of selection of the 1952 delegates, continues with their activities and voting records at the conventions, and concludes with the after-effects of convention events on the state parties. The final section of these state chapters is a good synthesis entitled "Review and Appraisal."

Independent of any conclusions suggested by it, this study should be of considerable importance to the social sciences for two reasons. First, it presents a monumental brief for cooperative research. In answer to the adherents of the school of intellectual free enterprise, who decry collectivist academic en-

---

1. Vol. I, *THE NATIONAL STORY*, p. xxii.

deavor, this work offers a compilation of information which could not have been gathered and digested by any single individual. The undertaking was made possible by the combined efforts of the American Political Science Association, the Edgar Stern Family Fund, and the Brookings Institution. Numerous researchers and reporters in each state and territory wrote the individual delegation profiles. The integration, direction, and editing was done by a group headed by Mr. Paul T. David with the aid of a distinguished advisory committee.

Secondly, this work is the most sizeable addition to the growing collection of political case-method studies. Excepting certain turbulent tributaries, the mainstream of political theorists today espouses a scientific approach. It is notable that amidst the considerable heterodoxy of opinion, the affirmance of the case method both as a teaching and research device is a widely shared major premise. It is necessary in a work of this sort to avoid trite generalizations about the power process. At the same time, too great specificity deprives an observation of any systematic employment as a theorem of political action, since the many variables involved may never be duplicated. A middle course, so essential to success, has been generally followed here.

Part of this material will prove useful in the classroom as well as in research. Chapter Six of *The National Story* focuses sharply on the central problems of nominating procedure, and its style makes it readily adaptable for assigned course reading. The brief discussions of the minutia of the laws governing primary elections in the separate state sections should be of great value both to perspiring instructor and aspiring politician, since these rules are purposely complicated to put expertise at a premium and thus to bar the unlearned and money-lacking amateur.

The organization of the study could have been improved. Tighter editing and the application in parallel areas of similar analytical tools and common terminology would have enhanced its value. Some state summaries, for example that of Connecticut, are lucid and accurate. But in others, as in the general chapters, there are passages which seem hastily-written, superficial, naive, or inconsistent. A shocking example of inaccurate metaphor is that "Tammany has become a toothless cat."<sup>2</sup> This alerts even the most indifferent student of politics to view the balance of the data in the New York chapter with suspicion. Discounting Tammany has been a common mistake, but one that grows less excusable as evidence accrues showing that it is more than a shrouded ghost of Charlie Murphy's power that today controls the Democracy in New York. It is superficial to state that a nation-wide presidential primary would increase the power of the "interest groups, financial contributors, and 'spontaneous' organizations,"<sup>3</sup> implying that such pressure groups do not actively operate in the current convention system. It is naive to suggest that "an oath of office, sworn to by each delegate in the opening ceremonies of the national

---

2. Vol. II, THE NORTHEAST, pp. 166-7.

3. Vol. I, p. 210.

conventions, might help to make clear the delegate's obligation to seek and vote for the best-qualified presidential nominee."<sup>4</sup> Corruption from Teapot Dome to F.H.A. and from Judge Manton to J. Parnell Thomas has been committed by men under solemn oath of office, and its prophylactic value seems not dubious but nil. It is inconsistent to suggest that a delegate should be prohibited from accepting financial aid for travel expenses "or any other thing of value to influence his vote in the national convention"<sup>5</sup> when ten pages earlier we find that: "[W]e encountered no evidence that [financial assistance] had a significant effect upon voting behavior. In fact, no substantial evidence of any kind of vote-buying was encountered by this project."<sup>6</sup> In any case, the vote-buyers must be thwarted not by laws but by law enforcement.

This work reaches four major conclusions about the state of American politics today. One is that the diminution of patronage will have an increasingly important effect upon the strength of party organization. Despite the many methods of evading civil service requirements, the spoils system of today is a pale relic of its Jacksonian magnificence. What was once meat and gravy for ravenous party organizations has dwindled to mere additional delicacies.

A second conclusion stresses the influence of mass media of communication, particularly television, both on the nominating convention and on American politics in general. Despite the vague validity of this conclusion, it would seem that until political scientists can indicate with some certainty the specific effects of television on voting behavior, statements that television will be "important" have little value.

Thirdly, it is claimed that there is less "boss rule" today than formerly and also less than is popularly assumed. It may be, however, that the apparent decrease in boss rule stems from subtle changes in the methods and personalities of the bosses. Streamlined political organizations—especially in the Republican party—simply do not have in a dominant position the Thomas Nast prototype of a Big City Sachem with cigar and diamond stick pin. But leaders are no less bosses because they are soft-spoken. And while the currently fashionable euphemism is "opinion leaders," a realist might find little difference between them and the old urban machine boss or the autocrat of the courthouse clique. The real test of bossism is whether the intra-party power is concentrated in the hands of a small oligarchy or diffused throughout the ranks.

Finally, and centrally, this study concludes that the nominating conventions generally do reflect the wishes of the American people. Although this conclusion seems basically sound, it is difficult to document. Perhaps the best substantiation is the prevailing public satisfaction with convention results. As is pointed out, so long as this sentiment continues, no sweeping changes in nominating procedure are likely.

---

4. Vol. I, p. 245.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Vol. I, p. 235.

Those who consider themselves students of the social sciences should become acquainted with this work. And others in any way fascinated by the "Great Game," will find many hours of interest in these volumes.

NOEL ARNOLD LEVIN †

---

†Instructor in Government, Quinnipiac College.