

Where Dreams Go When They Die	234
Marriage on the Rocks, Up with a Twist	246
Kicking Ass and Taking Names	263
Buying Friends and Influencing People	268
Blue Chips, Dwarfs, and Survival	274
The Sea Creatures Crawl to the Shore	282
The Chill Winds of September	288

Index 297

FOREWORD

DAVID D. PERLMUTTER

Power politics and communication media have been intertwined throughout the history of hierarchical civilizations. Ancient monuments, for example, propagandized by means of huge statues and reliefs of themselves praying to approving gods, hunting dangerous beasts, and smiting enemies. One Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (c. 670 B.C.E.), summed up the content of these mass(ive) messages of the pre-printing and electronic world when he proclaimed, “I am powerful, I am omnipotent, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal.” The success or failure of such hyperbole and hypertrophy helped determine the rise and fall of dynasties and peoples.

But today’s global mass media, where scenes of distant wars and Senate hearings are delivered to our television and computer screens instantly, inundate us with a greater volume of and more complex information about the world than ever before. According to a 1998 United Nations report, for example, a greater number of people have access to a television set than to a flush toilet. An American can travel to a remote yurt in Mongolia and find the occupants curious and opinionated about Michael Jordan and Monica Lewinsky. Moreover, through a Web connection, we can virtually visit any spot on earth, read any text, and be informed (or misled) about any issue. Furthermore, whatever is being aimed at us in a million different sales pitches, spin cycles, and propaganda broadsides—a presidential candidate, toothpaste, new offshore drilling legislation—relies on mass media to “get out the message,” “target the audience,” and “engineer public opinion.” Hence there is a need for all parties involved, from the salesperson to the public, to manage what is put out and what is taken in.

The politics@media book series is an effort to help clarify this disjointed, overwhelming, and amazing modern world of politi-

cized mass media and mass-mediated politics. It is predicated on the assumption that for the democratic experiment to survive, we must understand how it interplays with today's converged electrodigital communication environment. Accordingly, this project—a joint effort by a public affairs, policy, and research foundation and a university press—also endeavors to innovate. Specifically, we will feature books that are distinctly contemporary, that concentrate on today's political problems. The concepts that these books put forth will eventually become part of the world of media and politics that they study. Naturally, we will favor titles that promote turning ideas into action: applied lessons and practical advocacy.

The books will be aimed at both the trade public affairs market and the college classroom. We will produce works that teachers will employ to outline modern issues in political communication and that journalists and political workers might use as sourcebooks and guidebooks for their writing and research. Since these books are meant to attract the literate public affairs reader (and student), they will not be bulky, thousand-footnoted tomes. As recently explained to a political consultant, "We want this to be a book series whose titles you can use in your job and professors can use in their classes with equal enthusiasm."

A critical decision, therefore, was choosing our debut text. Should it be a book that dealt with such issues as money and mass-mediated politics, or a case study in mediated public policy or mass-mediated foreign affairs, or ethics and morality, or media credibility and faith in public institution, or mass media and governance, or mass media's impact on the popular culture of politics, or online politics? Moreover, should it be a book written with learning and critical insight by a political or media professional or a hands-on, applied study by an accomplished academic? All such texts would have been and will be welcome.

Raymond Strother's *Falling Up*, we decided, was a good example of the hybrid we seek to solicit and produce. It is, of course, primarily a political memoir. Yet it is also a book with richness and lore for many audiences, from students of politics and media to experienced pros in the field to academics with mostly research-level familiarity with modern campaigns and elections. It is neither a dry-as-dust textbook nor a breezy but empty kiss-and-tell pathography; however, it manages to both teach and entertain. It offers us a glimpse of a netherworld of back rooms and commercial sets that is both unalloyed and unromanticized but also fascinating and reveal-

ing. Finally, it highlights problems and offers solutions; Strother wants to make things better, to prescribe what works and proscribe what is harmful.

Strother is uniquely qualified to write this book. He was, indeed, present at the early days of modern political consulting in the 1960s and came of age professionally when political consulting exploded in size, wealth, and power in the 1970s and 1980s. Such experience allows him to tell us stories and make observations that give us an insider's perspective without an insider's myopia. In addition, Strother was and is not just a man of affairs or an adviser to power. He is an artist, a man who feels more at home splicing celluloid and appraising the light of the "magic hour" than smoking a cigar in the poker hall. His combined pragmatism, idealism, and aesthetic sensitivity allow him to make insights that a one-dimensional businessman would ignore.

In general, I think he makes four main points of use to ordinary voters, journalists, researchers, and political workers. First, there were no "good old days"; rather, in Strother's lifetime, the political/mass-media complex has been a source of abuse of power. This is a point well worth repeating for all of American history: each era had its problems. George Washington may have dreamed that the new republic's politics would sustain itself without factions and tomfoolery, but when he first ran for a legislature he lubricated voters with hard cider. And Thomas Jefferson would probably not have won the presidency without a tremendous get-out-the-vote and "image" campaign by his ace political consultant John Beckley. Modern readers of *Moby-Dick* (set in the 1840s) will be wryly amused to note that the novel's headlines of the day were a contested presidential election and a war in Afghanistan. And, of course, today's campaign reforms are after all only revisions of previous reforms.

Each generation, Strother reminds us, creates its own vices and virtues, and often they are mixed in the same person or movement. For example, one of the heroes in these chapters is the late Mississippi senator John Stennis—a great and good man, but a near-lifelong segregationist, too. That does not mean these are the best of times—far from it. Modern politics, as Strother reveals, is driven by an almost unprecedented obsession with and need for mass media exposure and mass mediated public approval. Worse, political leadership is a product of intensive polling to answer the question, "Will this look and sound good on TV?" The result is worse than an empire of spin: the very nature of who runs for office has been changed. Once

upon a time we had senators, like Stennis, who, whether you agreed with them or not, sincerely believed in what they advocated and didn't confer with a team of "consultants" before they made decisions. They asked men like Strother to help them win elections, not, as do the pols nowadays, to actually govern. The men and women of that generation may not have been more honest than candidates and legislators today, but at least they were leaders in the now archaic sense of the word.

Third, money, while not actually power, is increasingly the arbiter of who has power. Modern mass media politics is expensive. Strother shows us how and why that money is spent and, often, wasted. He provides us a portrait of men and women who generally have good intentions but whose consciences are ground down by the relentless need to raise bigger and bigger war chests. (Most of that money, of course, goes to pay for television ads.) The result is frightening: only people who have devoted their lives to getting rich or getting rich friends can run for higher office. The perpetual candidate is also a bottomless money pit. While it's not impossible to remain concerned with the common good and stay honest in such a system, it's very difficult.

Strother's final point is more subtle. Certainly much is wrong in his world of media and politics. Modern mass media have created a dystopia where private life is as fair game for the klieg lights as public speech, where increasingly journalists are fascinated with the horse race, not with the issues, where principles take a second place to polling numbers, where money is the holy grail, and where winning is the only test of virtue. But if this were just a back-room-at-Babylon scandal revelation or a sky-is-falling jeremiad, *Falling Up* would not be useful for our series or our intended readers. Strother does not believe that the situation is hopeless; he consistently makes the point that good people can make a difference, that the public are not dupes who will buy any inane idea or vote for any worthless fop. His cynicism is moderated by a deep patriotism, the belief that America still works if we want to fix it and make it better. He underlines that if we wait for a mighty pharaoh to solve our problems for us, hope wanes. *Falling Up* is a call for the American people themselves to correct the deficiencies of media and politics.

For the reader, there is also a fascinating personal struggle. Strother is a real-life Horatio Alger, one who candidly assesses how he thinks he has lived up to his father's ideal of always looking out for the working man.

Indeed, *Falling Up* is much more than a "getting even" score-settler or a "present at the creation" political testament. In fact, it might be categorized in literary genre as an old-fashioned two-fisted tale of the sea. This a rousing adventure, but one that speaks to clear and present dangers that affect our lives.

That is why *Falling Up* will become a classic political memoir and a staple of every political library and classroom, not just because it provides us insider views of famous politicians, but also because—and here the scholar and student of political communication will be particularly rewarded by the reading of this book—we learn how the process of becoming a candidate, winning an election, and staying in power actually works.