



Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention
Charlotte, North Carolina, September 2012

The Long Winding Road to the White House:

caucuses, primaries and national party conventions in
the history of American presidential elections

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Almost the Last Hurrah

At last we know officially. In late August at their 40th national convention in Tampa, Florida, the Republican party formally nominated its candidates to run for election as president and vice-president of the United States of America. Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts and son of a governor of Michigan (himself once a presidential hopeful), has been chosen to oppose President Barack Obama, triumphing after an initially bruising primary campaign – and needing to bind up the Republican party's wounds (to echo Abraham Lincoln, the first and for many the greatest Republican president). From now until early November Romney and his running-mate Paul Ryan will be trying to unseat Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden, while the

rest of the Republican party will seek to increase their power in the US Congress by enlarging their majority in the House of Representatives (where Ryan is a very influential member) and dislodging the Democrats from their narrow control of the Senate.

The constitutional framework and the numbers game

A great paradox characterizes the discussion and practice of American politics. In a society which is self-consciously forward-looking, where every speech from local to national level invokes the future, the political system and its ideological framework are structured by the federal constitution devised in Philadelphia 225 years ago, shortly after the successful conclusion of the War of Independence. So while the thirteen

formerly British colonies expanded first in North America and then overseas to exert global power, the 'more perfect union' proposed by the Framers in 1787 has changed little in its organic law. Certainly 27 formal amendments have been made to the Philadelphian original; but ten of these (the Bill of Rights) were added almost immediately as conditions for ratifying the foundational text itself. One aspect which has remained virtually unchanged is Article II, concerning the 'executive power' and its 'vest[ing] in a president...'; and under this rubric is detailed the method of electing the chief executive. (Amendment XII, ratified in 1804, tidied up the ambiguity over the separate elections for the president and vice-president.)

The method of electing the president is not only venerable, it is extremely



complex: testimony to the Framers' desire to damp down the 'violence of faction' and the 'turbulence and contention' of mass politics (in James Madison's words). When voters go in person to the polls on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November (as federal legislation requires) – or, increasingly, cast a postal vote beforehand – the individual citizen will not be voting directly for one presidential candidate, in the instant case the incumbent Obama or his major challenger, Romney. Rather the individual will be voting for a state-wide slate of 'Electors' (as the constitution designates them), who have declared their support for Obama or Romney or any other duly registered presidential candidate. A few weeks later in early December, the successful slate of Electors will meet in their state capitals (Sacramento, California; Springfield, Illinois; Albany, New York) and formally cast their pledged votes for their chosen candidate, the successful slate having been elected on a winner-takes-all basis by a simple plurality of the popular vote throughout the individual state. (The exceptions are specified below.)

But now come complications which determine not just the presidential elections in the United States but the primary campaigns, party caucuses and nation-wide nominating conventions which precede them. For the US presidential election procedure is not only indirect, but doubly disproportional. The first and more obvious way derives from the winner-

takes-all principle which turns the plurality of the state-wide popular vote into a sweep of all the Electoral College votes of that state for the leading candidate. (Maine and Nebraska are the sole exceptions to this pattern, each allowing a split vote to reflect the relative support throughout the state for the individual candidates.) But what is the Electoral College? The question is apt; for the constitution does not use this term. Instead the expression has arisen to describe the method for calculating the voting-weight of the fifty individual states of the union, plus since 1961 the District of Columbia, site of the federal government.

The relatively brief and original federal constitution of seven Articles (ratified in 1788) and the Bill of Rights (effective in 1791) contain a series of deals and trade-offs, none more so than the Connecticut Compromise, which informs Article I ('legislative powers') and which created i) a Senate based upon the sovereign equality of each and every state and ii) a House of Representatives whose composition reflects the population-numbers of the individual states. Thus California, the most populous state during the last four decades, has 53 Representatives in the House; while the least populous state, Wyoming, has one member. Conversely both California (population over 37 million) and Wyoming (population half a million) have two senators each. In the informally named Electoral College each of the fifty states is assigned a number

of Electors equal to its congressional representation – the District of Columbia being accorded three Electors to parallel 'the least populous state' (Amendment XXIII). In this way California has 55 Electoral College votes and Wyoming has three. (The House numbers are re-apportioned every ten years according to demographic shifts registered in the decennial census.) The Electoral College never meets in conclave; rather the victorious slates, having met in person in their state capitals, send their decisions off to Washington, where in early January the two houses assemble on Capitol Hill and accept – invariably – the returns from the state capitals and officially announce the winners of the presidential and vice-presidential elections, the winning totals being aggregated from the individual state votes. In the current election the Electoral College tally will reach 538: 435 votes based upon the number of Representatives and distributed proportionally to the states, with a minimum of one vote for the sparsely populated states; 100 votes to match the total of Senators in the Congress; and three votes for the District of Columbia. A grand total of 538. To be declared the winner, Obama or Romney must gain 50% plus 1, i.e. 270 votes in the Electoral College. If neither candidate reaches this threshold (a majority in American terminology), then the House of Representatives, each state casting one vote as a bloc, will decide the outcome in a run-off election between the three – rather than top two – leading candidates.

James Madison, fourth President of the United States, and one of the authors of the Federalist Papers, in which he deprecated the influence of partisanship and mob politics.



Henry Lee, 'Light Horse Harry', Governor of Virginia and trusted officer of George Washington.

Conventional politics and presidential candidates: the ante-bellum period

Determining the victorious presidential candidate through the vote of the House of Representatives has happened twice in American history. The first occasion in 1801 saw the protracted election of Thomas Jefferson and vice-president Aaron Burr – and the subsequent passage of the XII Amendment. The second time was in 1825 and the even more controversial election of John Quincy Adams, for he had recently lost to his main rival, Andrew Jackson, both in the Electoral College and in the popular vote. The shenanigans behind the House vote took an early place in the lengthy catalogue of American political scandals. But in the history of presidential elections and their preliminaries, the 'corrupt bargain' which put Adams into the White House and made one of his rivals, Speaker of the House Henry Clay, Secretary of State (the usual route to the presidency) merits inclusion for a more worthy reason: the institution of the national party nominating convention.

Despite the detail in the constitution given to the method of *electing* the president, nothing is said about the process of *nomination*. Following the uncontested and uncontroversial election of the first president, George Washington, members of Congress took the lead in proposing presidential candidates, in a nominating procedure called – with growing disapproval – the Congressional Caucus (from an Algonquin word suggesting counsellor or elder). With Adams' unexpected and seemingly undeserved victory and Jackson's promotion of greater popular participation (for white males) in electoral politics, the movement grew for wider involvement in the nomination process. So was born the national party nominating convention, somewhat prematurely through the short-lived and paranoid Anti-Masonic party, but in full strength already by 1831-1832 in the form of the Jacksonian Democratic Party and the anti-Jacksonian, Adams/Clay-led National Republicans, forerunners of the American Whigs.

For the next thirty years the great and linked issues of American politics were continental expansion and whether the new territories stretching to the Pacific would be open or closed to slavery. In seeking to compromise the issues (or more exactly, continuing the many compromises since the 1780s) the Whigs disappeared, the Democrats barely held together, and the Republicans emerged, ambivalent as a party about the place of slavery in the United States. But such was the Republican determination under Abraham Lincoln to halt the *extension* of slavery, that Democrats and former Whigs split into pro-Union and anti-Union sections. On the eve of the Civil War (1861-1865) three parties contested the presidential and congressional elections with the northern and western-based Republicans: i) mainstream Democrats under Stephen A. Douglas; ii) so-called Southern Democrats led by John C. Breckinridge; and iii) the mainly ex-Whig Constitutional Unionists under John Bell. Hugely important though these four groupings were in the outbreak and conduct of the Civil War, all had been created through national party conventions, which themselves reflected the institutionalising of presidential nominating over some three decades.

From the Anti-Masons in 1831 onwards all the major parties held quadrennial national nominating conventions – with one exception in 1836, when the Whigs hoped to throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives again. 'Third parties' followed suit: the Liberty party in 1843; the Free Soilers in 1848; and the American (or Know-Nothing) party in 1856 – not to forget the inheritors of some of these earlier movements: the Republicans in 1856. By the time of the historic conventions of 1860, when the Democrats split three ways and the Republicans united under Lincoln, the shape and purposes of the nominating conventions had been clearly established.

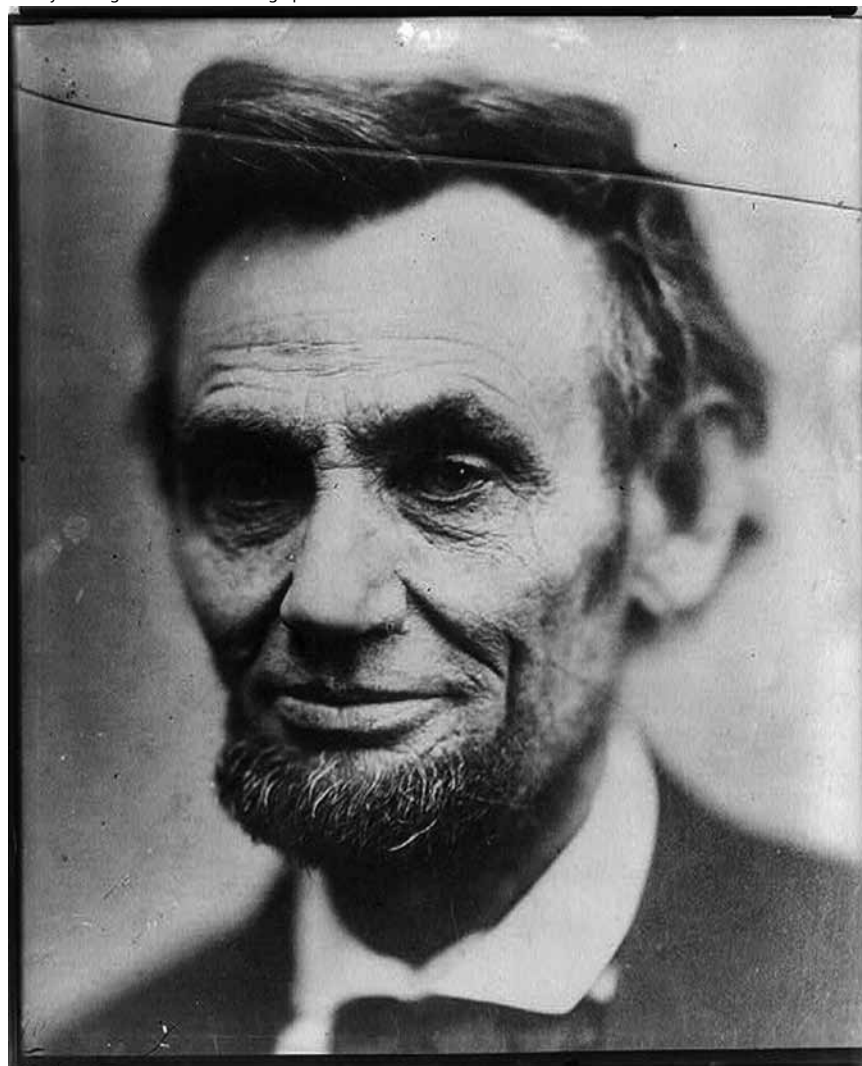
Aside from the selection of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, perhaps the aspect of the institutionalising most obvious to an outsider was the frequent choice of Baltimore as a meeting-place, especially for the Democrats: close to Washington; chief city of Maryland, itself a 'border' slave state, i.e. south of the Mason-Dixon line but lacking the economic and ideological commitment to slavery held by the Deep South; and with good communications by rail and sea. (After the Civil War, both for political reasons and as a sign of the westwards advance of population, Chicago replaced Baltimore in this leading role.) Somewhat below the general eye but clear to insiders was the growth of corresponding committees, which later became more formalised into executive bodies linking the sequential nation-wide plenary assemblies and overseeing the election campaigns for the presidency and Congress. Here were the forerunners of today's National Committees of the Republican and Democratic parties. To present a manifesto to the voting public, the conventions drew up lists of resolutions, which soon became the 'planks' of party 'platforms'. There was no fixed pattern to the numbers simply attending; but in the very earliest years two major decisions were made by the Democrats about how votes were to be evaluated. The more important and longer-living was the decision, followed broadly by other political parties, that voting by delegates to

a national party convention should be on a state-basis, with each state having a vote weighted to reflect its strength in the Electoral College. It remained to be seen whether such state-delegation voting was to adhere to the 'unit rule' of the bloc-vote (adopted in 1844) or whether split voting by individuals or groups might be allowed. The second decision applied solely to the Democrats and it recorded the southern strength of the party in its very earliest days. At the Democrats' first national convention they adopted the two-thirds rule, which meant that no candidate could be successfully nominated as its presidential candidate unless endorsed by two-thirds of the delegates. This simple but highly effective procedural requirement ensured that from 1832 until its abolition in 1936 Democratic candidates for the office of president of the United States supported – if not warmly favoured – the general southern position on slavery and (later) Black civil rights. Thus by the eve of the brutal and bloody Civil War today's two main political parties had built the basic framework of the national party nominating convention. But with one exception – or rather addition: the presidential primary. The growth, if not quite the origins of this later plebiscitary system occurred between two of the most important conventions and presidential elections in the pre-World War I history of the Democratic and Republican parties.

Post-bellum America: progressive politics and the growth of presidential primaries

In the decades before the Civil War the intertwined issues of slavery and westward expansion had destroyed one party, the Whigs; divided another, the Democrats; and created a third, the Republicans. In the years following the war today's two main parties established their joint hold over American voters despite the emergence of more 'third parties': the Greenback, Prohibitionist, Populist, Socialist and Progressive parties, to name only the most prominent. Now the dominant political issues were industrialization, urbanization, the growth of capitalism and the rise of organized labour, immigration, overseas expansion, agricultural depression and monetary contraction, women's rights, and legal protection for the ex-slaves and other African Americans.

At the 1896 Democratic convention in Chicago the delegates adopted a radical inflationary programme designed to help the farmers and the debtors of the South and West – and thereby split with wage-workers in



the industrial North and East and economic conservatives ('gold bugs'), Democratic no less than Republican, throughout the Union. Some months later in the Electoral College the 'sectional' (regional) character of the vote was as pronounced as any since the Civil War, in marked contrast to the outgoing Democratic president's victory in 1892. Democratic party bosses and 'stalwarts' might blame the 1896 defeat on the convention delegates' failure to compromise issues and unite the different intraparty interests, north and south, east and west. But in 1912 it was precisely the power of the Republican party insiders which could be blamed for their defeat by the Democrats, led by Woodrow Wilson. For it was at the Republican convention in Chicago that the Republican 'old guard' and state and city party bosses (including those in the Democrat-dominated South) backed the candidacy of the incumbent President William Howard Taft and denied former-President Theodore Roosevelt the chance to run again. The Republican 'stand-patters' and 'regulars' might argue that Roosevelt was breaking the 'no-third-term' maxim, having succeeded

the assassinated William McKinley in 1901 and had therefore served almost the eight years of a two-term presidency when he completed his second and full term in 1909. But unprecedented or not, the insider objections to Teddy Roosevelt's running in 1912 were political rather than constitutional. He was too radical on issues such as the public regulation of utilities and the management of the federal domain; he did not accept the power of rival Republican fiefdoms in Taft's Ohio or his own state of New York; he denounced 'predatory wealth' and 'special privilege', as he sought to 'subordinate the big corporation[s] to the public welfare.' Roosevelt was, in a contemporary, catch-all and imprecise word, too 'progressive'.

In 1896 the Democrats had not so much split at their convention as tried to incorporate too many conflicting positions, drawing much from the populist programme of the contemporary and eponymous People's Party. In 1912 the Republicans had indeed split, with the progressive wing 'bolting' from Taft and his supporters and uniting behind Teddy Roosevelt's Progressive 'Bull Moose' campaign. Until

now capital P Progressives constituted a movement rather than a party; were found throughout the nation but mainly in the North and East and on the Pacific coast; were urban rather than rural; professional people, male and female, rather than industrial or agricultural workers. Nowadays they might be described as Independents of a liberal, reformist disposition, and not committed unconditionally to one or other of the major parties, for there were progressive Democrats in southern as well as northern urban areas. In the prevalent quasi-religious language of the time, they could be depicted, if not precisely defined, by their concerns and missions: by their works and fruits might they be known. Despite condescending to the mass of voters (seen as easily manipulated by party bosses), the progressive agenda had a strong plebiscitary element. Thus progressives favoured the 'initiative' to place by popular vote legislative proposals before local governments; the 'recall' via the ballot box of unsatisfactory public officials; 'referendums' on civic matters and state legislation; and, most relevant in the present context, they developed primary elections to determine candidates for ultimate office-holding. In the specific case of the national party conventions, those promoting the introduction of primaries believed that party bosses and the 'interests' (Big Business, Labour, new ethnic groups) determined, even fixed the selection of presidential candidates; and responsible citizens should influence at least the initial voting of convention delegates on potential presidential candidates. (Roosevelt had won nine primaries, including Ohio; Taft only one.) Absent from the platform of the Taftite Republicans, the presidential primary was a key plank for Wilson's Democrats and Roosevelt's Bull Moosers. In the phrasing of the 1912 Progressive platform: 'the party declares for [...] nationwide preferential primaries for candidates for the presidency....'

The rise and fall and rise again of the presidential primary

Some dozen states held primaries before Taft went down to defeat in 1912 and Wilson was elected; and by Wilson's re-election in 1916 the number had doubled. But after World War I the backing for presidential primaries waned, with some states even repealing the relevant legislation. (Two types of election were involved: that for the composition of the state's convention delegation; and that for expressing a preference for individual presidential candidates.) Conventions continued to be managed by party bosses in the proverbial 'smoked-filled



Theodore Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson, nominated as presidential and vice-presidential candidates on the Progressive 'Bull Moose' ticket in 1912. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

rooms', with Franklin D. Roosevelt one obvious beneficiary of old-style politics in 1932 – as had been Republican Warren G. Harding in 1920 and the scarcely-remembered John W. Davis 1924, nominated from among 16 contenders after a record 103 roll-calls over *nine* days by a Democratic convention which lasted *two and a half weeks*. (In 1763, more than three decades before he himself became president of the United States, John Adams deplored the 'tobacco' smoke-filled room of his 'Caucas Clubb' in Boston.)

In the century since the introduction of the presidential primary, the legislation governing these elections has varied enormously, between states, territories and possessions of the United States, and over time within individual jurisdictions. (Tiny Guam in the Western Pacific is an 'unincorporated territory' of the USA with no Electoral College vote but participates in the primary-caucus-national convention phase of the presidential election.) The two major parties continue to treat the size of resultant convention delegations and the allocation of votes differently, again with variations over time. So, for example, when the Republican party was weak in the South, northern party-members objected to the allocation of votes according to a state's weight in the Electoral College. Rather, Northerners argued, states should be weighted according to their success at the polls and rewarded or penalized with more or fewer voting-delegates. (Historically, Republican conventions have fewer delegates than the Democrats, 50% less on average.) Furthermore, some states like Texas have used *both* a presidential primary *and* a state convention or local caucuses to determine the composition of a delegation – complications multiplied by the number of states which make the simple arithmetic of the Electoral College

pellucidly clear by contrast! Nor did the advent of the presidential primary increase its importance dramatically, not least because presidential nominating caucuses still existed in some states. (Today's caucuses, used in roughly one quarter of the states, filter party-members' preferences up from precinct and ward to state-wide level, without attracting the publicity of the presidential primaries.) When convention time came, delegations had to bargain when their initial candidates, often the proverbial 'favourite son' of the home state, failed to make the grade or when a 'dark horse' emerged from the congested field and a 'bandwagon' started to roll; state delegations might be pledged or 'bound' only in the very early rounds of the nomination balloting, and so could be 'released' when momentum stalled for a particular candidate; and, most obviously, nominations for the presidency and vice-presidency had to be finalised when conventions deadlocked or a Democratic candidate could not muster the necessary 2/3 majority – a requirement until the Philadelphia convention of 1936.

FDR's three re-elections (the first in 1936) also help to explain the relative and temporary unimportance of the primary, plus the succession and nomination of two former vice-presidents, Republican Calvin Coolidge in 1924 and Democrat Harry Truman in 1948. Then between 1960 and 1972 came a mix of presidential primaries and national party conventions which contributed to the enormous importance the primaries exercise today. The earlier year saw Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts using primaries in West Virginia and Wisconsin to show that his Roman Catholicism and his legislative conservatism were no threat to (semi) southern Protestants and northern liberals. JFK's strategy and campaign were so effective he won the nomination on the first ballot at the Democratic convention in Los Angeles. He then showed more of his political skill by proposing his closest rival and Senate majority leader, Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, as vice-president to balance the campaign 'ticket'. Eight years later, following the assassination of Kennedy in November 1963 and LBJ's successful bid for election in 1964, the presidential nomination process changed profoundly.

The legacies of Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement

Kennedy's killing eased Johnson into the White House and then into the presidential nomination, where LBJ's authority was such that his choice as running-mate, Minnesota Senator Hubert Horatio Humphrey, was approved by acclamation. With

the platform also endorsed without a vote, 1964 registered only the second time (and the first since 1936) that the Democratic national party convention dispensed with roll-calls. Yet behind this surface unity there were profound divisions, with southern delegations, notably from Alabama and Mississippi, riven by racism and White opposition to LBJ's liberal agenda, and bristling at changes designed to weaken southern influence both in the Congress and in convention voting.

In 1964 the Democrats assembled in Atlantic City on the New Jersey shore; the Republicans convened in San Francisco overlooking the Pacific. The continental divide was a metaphor for the political distance that the Democrats sought to establish between themselves and their opponents. On the first ballot the Republicans nominated Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, for some time the darling of those he called 'conservatives'. In his acceptance speech Goldwater propounded his credo, which entered the political anthologies. 'I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.' A precise interpretation of Goldwater's maxims would need but might not be satisfied by an analysis of his earlier campaign-text, *Conscience of a Conservative*. But voters and the opposition Democrats could more easily read and perhaps tremble more readily at the Republican platform, which took the fight against the 'atheistic imperialism' of communism more openly and aggressively where it was detected in southeast Asia and the Caribbean.

Four years later and three issues were tearing the USA apart: the war in former French Indo-China (the 'Vietnam' war), the struggle for Black civil rights, and urban rioting. Millions of words have been written on their interaction; but through the twin lenses of presidential primaries and party convention politics the various elements come into sharp focus. Opponents of President Johnson's war policies entered the primaries to challenge LBJ's re-nomination; and so successful was the leading anti-war candidate, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, that LBJ rendered himself a 'lame duck' president by withdrawing from the race. Thereupon Robert Kennedy, brother of the assassinated President, joined the primary campaign – to be himself shot dead at the moment of winning in California, then the second largest state in the Electoral College. Yet despite not contesting a single primary, vice-president Humphrey had the convention tied up and was easily nominated on the

Perhaps in 2016 we shall see the first husband-wife presidential pairing of Hillary and Bill Clinton; or will it be Condoleezza Rice as the first woman and second African American president?



U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak in 2007. U.S. Department of State



President Barack Obama confers with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during the NATO summit in Strasbourg, France, 2009.

U.S. federal government image

first ballot thanks to an alliance of party bosses and southern conservatives. But Humphrey's nomination was not the whole story. Many of the delegations, predominantly from southern states, had their 'credentials' (or legitimacy) challenged on grounds of racism, with the decisions usually favouring the pro-Humphrey forces. Equally disturbing was the physical violence which broke out within the vast convention hall and on the surrounding streets, making the 1968 convention a byword for police brutality and 'Gestapo tactics', in the description of Democratic Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut.

Yet despite the divisions and violence of the 1968 Democratic Chicago convention, Humphrey lost to his Republican opponent, Richard M. Nixon (defeated by JFK in 1960) by less than 1% in the popular vote, with over 13% and 46 Electoral College votes going to a former Democrat and White supremacist, ex-Govr. George Wallace of Alabama, running on an 'American Independent' ticket. Here was yet another stage, reaching back to 1928, in the re-drawing of the US electoral map, as the Solid South became less solid for the national Democratic party and the Republicans established themselves in

areas largely barren electorally since the time of *post-bellum* Reconstruction.

Democratic party reforms and the revival of the presidential preference primary

In US political history the presidential election of 1972 is chiefly remembered for a) the bundle of criminal acts and 'dirty tricks' short-handed as Watergate and b) the overwhelming re-election victory of Nixon, just failing at 60.7% to match the record margins of FDR and LBJ in the popular vote, while losing only Massachusetts, the District of Columbia and one rogue Virginian in the Electoral College (18 in total). But in the wake of the 'violence-plagued assembly in Chicago' four years previously the Democratic party implemented for their 1972 convention a wide-ranging series of reforms proposed by two separate Commissions on i) Rules and ii) Party Structure & Delegate Selection. Promoting 'open' conventions in ways that would have been recognized and welcomed by turn-of-the-century Progressives, the respective O'Hara and McGovern-Fraser Commissions between them limited the influence of party officials in the composition of delegations, which themselves had to

reflect the gender, race and age profiles of their home states – a condition which applied to such crucial committees as those on platform-drafting, procedure ('rules') and credentials. For the future, the 1972 convention introduced proportional representation in primary elections, a decision following the logic of abandoning the unit rule at the 1968 convention which allowed delegations to split their collective vote without reference to the state Democratic party. So while the Democrats went down to a decisive presidential defeat in November 1972, their earlier summertime Miami Beach convention had set in train changes which have continued to shape the primary and convention 'Road to the White House' as we know it today.

Since 1972 no Democratic, no Republican presidential nominee has been able to avoid campaigning in the party's primaries. Indeed, unknown yet ultimately successful presidential hopefuls have used the primaries to attract public attention: on the Democratic side Jimmy Carter in 1976; Bill Clinton in 1992; and Barack Obama in 2008, who (thanks to the *caucuses*) eventually overhauled the front-runner and heiress-apparent, Hillary Rodham Clinton. As for the Republicans, aka. the Grand Old Party, the strong if unsuccessful primary campaign of Ronald Reagan in 1976 weakened the electoral bid of incumbent President Gerald Ford; while four years later Reagan, having won 28 of 34 primaries, eased into the nomination at a laudatory party convention, where the only real decision lay in choosing the vice-presidential candidate, George Bush, Sr. (Reagan's election in 1980 and re-election in 1984 dramatised the shift of the Solid Democratic South to the Republicans.) Twelve years later Bush's son, George W. Bush, had a relatively easy primary ride to the GOP convention in Philadelphia, where the delegates unanimously nominated 'Dubya' Bush and set the cast-list for only the second father-son pairing in the White House after John and John Quincy Adams, the second and sixth presidents.

Familiar worries and more familiar advice

The 2000 presidential election is remembered less for the Bush-family triumph than for the controversial election of Bush, Jr., outdistanced in the popular vote by Al Gore (47.9%-48.4%) yet victorious in the Electoral College (271-266) thanks to his disputed allocation of Florida's 25 votes. If there is a similar outcome in 2012, for Obama and Romney are close in the opinion polls, then we can expect a re-run of the bitter partisan and constitutional wrangling which accompanied the Bush-Gore election and which refreshed the perennial debate about the workings and merits of the Electoral College. Yet any change to the Electoral College will require a most unlikely constitutional amendment and necessarily affect the presidential nominating mechanics at primary, caucus and convention levels, for these are geared to this particular legacy of the 1787 Framers.

At stake, of course, is the most powerful political and military office in the world; for the President of the United States of America is constitutionally the US Commander-in-Chief, a role originally designed for George Washington. 'A citizen, first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen': the matchless encomium from 'Light-Horse' Henry Lee on Washington's death in 1799. What a standard to maintain! Will it be met by Mitt Romney? Or will the American electorate follow the advice of Abe Lincoln, Obama's political hero and rhetorical inspiration? As Lincoln wrote towards the close of the Civil War: 'it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river.'

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HA Resources

George III and America: www.history.org.uk/resources/general_resource_654.html

'Savages and rattlesnakes' Washington, District of Columbia: A British Diplomat's view 1823-5:

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President Barack Obama and the State of the Union Address:

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How did the Civil Rights movement change America?:

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Lyndon Johnson & Albert Gore: Southern New Dealers and the Modern South:

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