



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Walter Shapiro

In 2004: Political Columnist for *USA Today* and author of *One-Car Caravan: On the Road with the 2004 Democrats Before America Tunes In*

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December 13, 2013

Q: Walter, you wrote a book unlike any other, I think, about a presidential campaign. And that is, you began at -- what? Two-plus years --

SHAPIRO: It would have been the summer of 2002.

Q: So more than two years before the general election --

SHAPIRO: Two and a half years before the 2004 election.

Q: Why did you decide to write this book?

SHAPIRO: Why did I decide? Because I -- three reasons. Number one, because I realized, the only chance you have of getting access today to a candidate, is being there so early that you're jumping the story, because there is no chance of getting any time alone. Or there was no chance, against the backdrop of 2004, unless you start ridiculously early. Number two, the whole machination of who runs and who doesn't, and how candidates [00:01:00] organize themselves, is really, really interesting, and it's often not nearly as well-covered as the much more automated, later parts of the campaign. And what I kept saying is that any of these candidates in 2002 are the same person who would go into the Oval Office in 2005. And the idea that somehow an answer to a question in 2004 is more revealing of who they are than what I asked in 2002 is ludicrous.

Number three -- and this was the high-wire act of my life. I wanted to get out a book, in the hands of voters, before the Iowa caucuses. There was always the problem with campaign books -- you know, much like Bible stories. You know how those end. [00:02:00] And I wanted to try to do a campaign book, where you didn't know what the end was. Also, I really had hoped that it would really help shape the campaign



debate. Now, for the rueful confession -- and this is book economics. It only belatedly occurred to me that if you publish a book in early November, that it will become out of date in early January, with the Iowa caucuses. Your selling period is not infinite. And -- how do I say this? I think in the history of publishing, this was not the greatest money-maker. But the relevance of the book, and *One Car Caravan: On the Road with the Amer--* with the 2004 Democrats before America tunes in, [00:03:00] is -- I did not realize that I was writing an ode to how politics used to be.

That, the fact is, that I got large amounts of access to all the Democratic contenders for president in 2004. From spending -- (sirens) I apologize about the fire truck, but this is a little bit of, shall we say, *cinéma vérité* (laughter). I will pause mid-sentence. In fact, (inaudible) --

CREW: So you should be OK.

SHAPIRO: What?

CREW: You're mic'ed, so you --

SHAPIRO: Oh, OK. OK. Then I will -- I was over -- what I started to say is that I -- this was an ode to how politics used to be. Where, if you start early enough, you can [00:04:00] actually get access to the candidates.

The book starts off with me, in a car, with Howard Dean, while he was governor of Vermont, and the entourage consists of Dean, one aide, and the state trooper who's driving him from Vermont to a spaghetti supper in New Hampshire, and then back again. I spent two days with John Kerry, as he campaigned for 2004 Democrats in October of 2002, as the only reporter with him for two days. In similar fashion, I had - I sat with John Edwards, and John Edwards's wife, as they made up the decision about whether or not he should run. You know, I met Joe Lieberman's mother.

The point is -- and I spent a lot of time with Dick Gephardt, the fifth major candidate. But the point is, I thought of doing such a [00:05:00] book in 2008. But you couldn't do a book. The what -- Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton doled out access with an eyedropper. No matter how early you went, you would never be the only reporter traveling with someone. There was -- I remember going to an Obama inaugural visit to New Hampshire, sometime -- God, maybe in December of 2006 -- and there were 150 reporters, at an initial New Hampshire Obama press conference.

Hillary, who I've known, who I met, first interviewed in the governor's mansion in Little Rock, would -- granted me an interview, but it was only on the telephone. So the idea of getting this kind of access -- and [00:06:00] in 2008, it was a year also filled with control-freak Republicans. That the idea of Rudy Giuliani, who as Mayor New York, was incredibly hostile to the press, would have let me do this. Or Mitt Romney. And in 2012, the idea that Mitt Romney -- the most buttoned-down candidate, who



let no one close to him, would have allowed me to spend days with him, is just ludicrous.

So, if I had tried to do it in 2008, or 2012, I would have had very nice stories of Chris Dodd, of Joe Biden, of Bill Richardson, in 2008. And in 2012, an awful lot of Rick Santorum.

Q: Now, in the book, you used the term, “invisible primary” to describe this pre-election [00:07:00] year campaign. Some people might say it’s invisible because it’s not important. But what is it that’s important that happens?

SHAPIRO: Well, first of all the phrase, “the invisible primary,” isn’t mine. It was coined by another writer, for a 1976 book on the run-up to the ’76 election. And the problem with doing it too far in advance, is he forgot to mention, he left out one candidate, Jimmy Carter. (laughter) But the whole idea of the invisible primary -- and this is the world before MSNBC covers everything intensively, before Fox News covers everything intensively, before *Politico*, and before BuzzFeed, is that there was always a year and a half, where candidates knew they were running for president, they could quietly go to Iowa, under the guise of campaigning for local officials. They could meet people. [00:08:00] They could get their stump speech down. And they can do it -- not entirely invisibly, but at least with enough stealth that it was not like you’re opening on Broadway on day one.

I think because our appetite for politics is so intense right now, I don’t think that invisible primary period exists. It certainly didn’t exist with Obama and Hillary in 2006 and 2007, and it’s certainly not existing right now, with Hillary Clinton. But it did exist in almost every presidential season through 2004.

Q: Well, I want to get to what you learned about the individual candidates. But before we do that, what did you learn about the process by which we choose our nominees for president, by doing this book?

SHAPIRO: That’s -- I’m just trying to figure out where to start with this.

Q: Take your time.

SHAPIRO: [00:09:00] Because there is so much. First of all, it is -- the most important thing about presidential politics is the decision to run. Most of the press coverage treats the fact that every single politician in America is a uni-dimensional ambition machine, where it is without a doubt that they are running for president. And it becomes a shock when someone like Al Gore in 2004 doesn’t run, or a Mitch Daniels, or Haley Barbour, or Jeb Bush doesn’t run in 2012. But in truth, the most important thing is that moment where you look in the mirror, and say, “I am willing to devote two years of my life to this. And if I succeed, my life will never be the same. I will never have a [00:10:00] moment of privacy again. And if I fail, I could be humiliated.” And if I’m a politician -- and just to give a more recent example, if I’m a Chris Dodd, I may end up losing my seat in the Senate, because I left Connecticut behind, to become president.



Joe Lieberman, who I wrote about extensively in my book, who was a major 2004 candidate, lost the Democratic primary for the Senate in Connecticut in 2006. And partially because he was spending so much time in New Hampshire, running for president, that people thought that he had neglected them.

To just go off on a small Lieberman tangent, I remember somebody said, "It wasn't that Lieberman was for the war, and I'm against it. We do know he was a hawk. But we wanted to have him [00:11:00] listen to us, and we wanted to hear [inaudible]. And Joe wasn't in Connecticut." And as a result, he lost, famously lost the 2006 Democratic primary, and then got elected as an independent, after a [inaudible] moment.

But these are the risks of running for president, that it is not -- everyone is not automatically vaulted into the stratosphere of success. Even John Edwards, somebody who I think will come up again in this conversation, had he not run for president, he would have either had an affair, or not had an affair in 2005 or 2006. It would have been much smaller, and he probably might well still be the Democratic Senator of North Carolina now. Or if he was back, practicing law in [00:12:00] North Carolina, he would be practicing law without the stigma of scandal.

So the whole decision to run -- and smart people know, that there are downsides, as well as cheering parades and ticker tape, and taking the oath of office. It's probably the most important ingredient in the entire process.

Q: What else does a candidate have to do, during this period, to have -- to maximize his or her chance of success?

SHAPIRO: Well, the second one -- and this goes back to the Roger Mudd question to Teddy Kennedy in 1979, is a candidate has to know why they're running. And you know, often, candidates think that their biography is enough. John Edwards, I was the son of a millworker. And sometimes, it -- or John Kerry; my long service [00:13:00] in the United States Senate. But in truth, often, the people who know how the -- who know why they're running, are, to some extent the cause candidates. Howard Dean, in 2004, had a clearer sense of why he was running, as did Joe Lieberman, than anyone else in the race. They were on opposite sides of the Iraq War, but they were running in significant measure, because of the Iraq War, or that was part -- an integral part of their appeal.

You know, someone like Dick Gephardt, who was an inside the Beltway -- oh, I've used that -- this whole interview, I'm going to ration myself to three "inside the Beltways," and I've just used my first -- (laughter) -- was an inside the Beltway player, as Senate House Minority Leader. Really thought [00:14:00] that his whole biography of son of a milkman, was -- and the fact that he had been carrying water for the Democrats in



good years, as well as bad, would be enough. Clearly, it wasn't. But the second reason is really to think about, why am I running? Sometimes the "why am I running?" changes radically. I don't think John Kerry ever realized how much the "I was for it before I was against it" and his contortions over Iraq were going to come back and haunt him in 2004. But that is the second.

The third reason -- and this is hiring staff. Often, campaigns go through staff two or three times. Certainly, to give the famous example, [00:15:00] Hillary Clinton's decision to have Mark Penn, the pollster, who didn't know that California was not a winner-take-all primary, as the first among equals in her 2008 campaign, played a lot - played a major role of why she is not president right now. So that's the third reason.

And the fourth reason is, Iowa has 99 counties. It takes a long time to visit them. Even New Hampshire, a much smaller state, you've got to go up to Berlin. You've got to know how to pronounce "Berlin." You've got to do all of those things, to show voters in these few early primary states that you care. And that requires an awful lot of time. And [00:16:00] while we're getting away from this, with rockstar candidates, like Hillary Clintons and Barack Obamas, the whole idea of listening to candidates talk in New Hampshire living rooms, early on, or in pizza ranches, as Rick Santorum did in Iowa, is just a wonderful bit of Americana. And also a wonderful part that I still love about our political system, that you can make a lot of complaints against Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina. Two of them are exceedingly white. One of them, New Hampshire, is exceedingly secular, and quite wealthy. In Iowa, in particular, the Republican conservatives [00:17:00] are exceedingly conservative. But for the most part, those three states are not a terrible way -- place to begin. They're, each one, is very different from one another. South Carolina being added to the mix does mean that there is a significant African American vote, as Hill and Hillary -- Hillary and Bill Clinton learned to their distress in 2008 in the Democratic primaries.

It also gives a different flavor to the Republican race, in the sense that, you have both religious conservatives in South Carolina, but you also have wealthy northern retirees, who are Republican along Hilton Head, and that whole strip, and you are now getting up in York County. You're getting the overflow from the Charlotte metroplex. [00:18:00] So you also are getting the sort of middle-manager types.

So, if there's one state in this process I love more than any other -- and I have actually, at one point, offered to the party chairmen of both parties that I would do a TV ad boosting the state's role in the process, and that is the state of New Hampshire. My love of New Hampshire, because they do what they're supposed to do -- that, in New Hampshire, everybody votes. I don't have the statistics in front of me, but the level of citizen participation in the primary is stunning. The problem with Iowa is the Iowa



caucuses are such an odd-duck event, that has probably outlived its usefulness, and we'd be better off with an Iowa primary. Because it's a little [00:19:00] hard to justify to waitresses, say, who work evenings, that you -- or to the elderly. That you only -- have to go out on a snowy evening, and you have to be there from 6:30 to 8:30. Whatever your daycare situation is, in a world, in a country where we are having more and more early voting. This is the ultimate late-voting. And I think South Carolina's a good addition to the mix.

But my shorthand on Iowa and New Hampshire has always been, Iowa is impossible to poll, because you have no idea who is going to turn out. New Hampshire is impossible to poll, because voters can make -- change their mind at the last minute. The Obama campaign, before the 2008 primary, [00:20:00] their internal polls had Obama up 10 points. Hillary Clinton narrowly won that primary. In the same way, in 2008 -- forgive me for drawing on 2008, because I know we are supposed to be talking about 2004, but it's all of a piece. In 2008, the Clinton and Edwards campaigns, run by very smart people, figured that the primary, the caucus turnout would be 130- to 150,000 people. Only the Obama campaign, and the *Des Moines Register's* final poll estimated that the turnout would double pre-existing records on -- I think he had 230,000. So, I mean, that is -- rarely do you get turnout figures, estimates done by pros on...

[00:21:00] Jennifer O'Malley [Dillon?], who ended up, I think the Deputy Campaign Manager for Obama in 2012, ran Edwards in Iowa in 2008. So here you have a terrific political operative, who missed the turnout of the Iowa caucuses by about 75 percent. I could think of no other election, where smart people could be that wrong. And I will say that, of the thrills in Iowa, of politics, the morning of the 2004 Iowa caucuses -- notice I finally get back to our topic -- it's the only time I could ever think of, where you could have made a case that any of four candidates could finish first, or any of four candidates, could finish fourth. That you had just no idea. And in the [00:22:00] case of Iowa, in the case of -- Kerry had suffered so grievously, been down so long, had blown all of his early leads, was desperate for money, so that he arranged for a \$5,000 loaning himself, through a questionable decision of how much of his Boston townhouse was his, rather than how much was owned by his wife. But John Kerry could have been first, or he could have been last.

John Edwards was surging. Aaron Pickrell, who ran Iowa for Edwards in 2004, and later ended up running Ted Strickland's campaigns in Ohio, for governor, and ran Obama in 2012 in Ohio. But he has told me on occasion that if the caucuses were two days later in 2004, John Edwards [00:23:00] would have won. He was moving that fast. Dick Gephardt had all the institutional backing. You know, all the labor backing, had done all that kind of work. And in an organizational primary, you should never underestimate that. And Howard Dean had come out of nowhere. A burst like a



comet along the skies. Somebody who was getting thousand-person crowds at Grinnell College, just four months earlier. You could not rule him out either.

It didn't work out. It was -- there were really two tiers. It was Kerry-Edwards, then a long gulf back to Dean-Gephardt. But you could have argued it either way, anyway, on the morning of the 2004 Iowa caucuses.

Q: [00:24:00] You know, you wrote about the Democrats, but since you brought up the matter of putting together an organization, did any of the Democrats put together an organization that had anything of the character of the Bush organization, meaning, people who'd been together for several years, run a campaign together, and basically seemed to get along with each other, and be devoted to their candidate.

SHAPIRO: You'll be surprised at my answer: Dick Gephardt. Dick Gephardt is one of these people -- Joe Biden in 2008 was another -- where people who had left politics, people who had started out as political pollsters, and then became corporate pollsters, or people who started out doing political ads, and then were doing regular TV ads. People who started out as aides, and built entire careers, [00:25:00] came back for the Gephardt 2004 campaign, and they came back for the Biden 2008 campaign. And it didn't serve -- you cannot prove any result from this at all, in terms of, did Dick Gephardt drop out shortly after his fourth-place finish -- I believe it was fourth place in Iowa. But if you want a loyalty to someone, the two people I've encountered in modern politics, who had that long-term loyalty, are the two candidates who had the longest gap between their first run for president and the second. Gephardt was a serious contender as a young congressman in '88, and 16 years later, he ran for president in the worst way. (laughter) But in Biden's case, [00:26:00] he was all set to run in '88, and then he ran into the Neil Kinnock speech problem, where he incorporated words that were not his own. And then ran for president 20 years later.

This is -- unless Jerry Brown runs again -- Jerry Brown running in '76 and '92 is also about as long a gap as you get. And of course, if Jerry Brown wants to run in 2016, the crown is his.

Q: (laughs) Well, but usually, there's a trade-off, between loyalty -- persona loyalty, long-standing loyalty -- and competence; getting the best people for this election at this time. Is that part of the reason why Gephardt and Biden didn't do all that well?

SHAPIRO: No, I think the nature -- in Gephardt's -- Gephardt's problem is he was perceived as yesterday's man, as well as being an unequivocal [00:27:00] supporter of the Iraq war. Probably less out of conviction, and more out of the sense that this was the politically smart thing to do. In the case of Biden, he never raised any money in 2008. And it was really hard for anyone to get traction, in a field dominated by Hillary Clinton. Barack Obama -- and forget the pyrotechnics of John Edwards' affair. The pyrotechnics of Elizabeth Edwards having a recurrence of breast cancer, and candidly saying that this is incurable, I'm going to die.



Q: Something we haven't talked about, but that I think also figures in your story, is raising money, and -- during the pre-election year period. And one observation you make is that post McCain-Feingold, Democrats [00:28:00] now had to learn how to raise money in small increments, rather than getting big checks. Could you talk about that?

SHAPIRO: Yeah. First of all, we've now gone through about six different incarnations of political fundraising. But up until 2002, soft money ruled the game. That presidential candidates would agree to matching funds, which meant that they were limited in how much they could spend overall, and in specific states, and that they would fund the fall campaign out of Federal dollars. I believe Bush 2004 -- well, Bush 2000 may have been the first one to privately fund his fall campaign. But there was a spending limitation put on that.

What happened up until 2002 -- McCain-Feingold took effect on January 1, [00:29:00] 2003 -- is that big donors would channel soft money, which are large donations solicited by the candidates through party committees, which would be a large chunk of the fall campaign spending. That ended with the 2004 campaign, and in some ways, 2004 was the turning point. When Howard Dean set off as a governor of the small state of Vermont, wanting to run for President, a man whose most expensive re-election race had a million dollars, he met with a woman named Stephanie [Shiraq?], who was going to be his fundraising director. I believe she's now the head of Emily's List. And she asked him, how much did he think he could [00:30:00] raise? Lying through his teeth, Dean said the most amazing number that he could possibly come up with. "I think maybe overall, we could raise \$10 million." This was said by a candidate who might have figured the real number was a million and a half. But by the nature of the Howard Dean phenomenon, being the first internet candidate, that they had no idea what they had launched, that the original Dean fundraising -- I mean, in early 2003, internet fundraising was mostly seen as a way of, "Yes, I guess you can pay online with your Visa card. That means we'll get the money immediately, instead of having to do what we always have to do, which is fill up a FedEx envelope with checks from a [00:31:00] fundraiser, and mail them in, and there's five or seven days that you wait for the money to clear." So to some extent, internet fundraising was not supposed to tap a new vein; it was just a way of getting the old funding faster.

And almost as a lark, at the end of the March 31 filing period, for the first quarter of 2003, the Dean people just put up on the web, one of those old-fashioned fundraising thermometers, the kind of things that used to be on town greens in New England, letting you know how far you had gotten towards the United Way goal. And somehow, both because Dean appealed to early adapters to the computer -- even though he was a bit of a [00:32:00] technophobe himself -- because of his anti-war stance, the thing just hit a gusher. I mean, this was like what it must have been like to



be in Sutter's Mill in 1848, that they could not believe what they were doing in small contributions, off the internet.

John Edwards and John Kerry vied with each other in the first quarter of 2003, to be the first one to announce their numbers. Who was going to be bigger? Edwards. Kerry was going to try to blow everyone out of the water, saying, "You can't compete with me, I'm the frontrunner." Edwards was going to prove his credibility by getting all this money from the trial lawyers, in legal contributions up to \$2,000, which I think was the -- then, was the ceiling. And they went through this sort of Alfonse and Gaston routine, about who would be the first to release their [00:33:00] numbers before the -- he put out the press release that we've filed. And it ended up, I think Edwards outraised -- I'm doing this from memory -- Edwards outraised Kerry by, like, \$200,000. Seven-point-four to \$7.2 million. In the second quarter of 2003, Howard Dean raised nearly \$8 million, almost all in small contributions, almost all on the internet. And the internet age in which Barack Obama raised over \$200,000 in 2012 in small contributions was born.

Q: Walter, when you started following Howard Dean -- you've already mentioned he was a technophobe. He was not the inspiration for this internet campaign.

SHAPIRO: He didn't carry a computer with him. I remember [00:34:00] sitting with Howard Dean, running into him in a hotel lobby after a DNC speech, in January of 2003, where he actually took the line from Paul Wellstone, "I'm from the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party," and got a major response. He was sitting in -- by himself, in the -- somewhere in the lobby, the lower lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington, I believe it was. Explaining how, isn't it wonderful? He could dictate press releases into the phone, and his aides would pick it up, and print them out. (laughter)

Q: (laughs) Excuse me. (laughs)

SHAPIRO: One of the great difficulties of the Dean campaign, particularly early on, is the candidate had [00:35:00] difficulty retrieving his own cell phone messages. (laughter)

Q: But I think, also, he didn't start out as the anti-war candidate, did he? He was the governor who knew how to run --

SHAPIRO: He was the governor who knew how to -- my -- I don't think I'm giving away his secret. When my friend Mandy Grunwald, who -- a media consultant for Hillary, both in 2008 and 2006 for the Senate race, but was working for Joe Lieberman in 2004. But she was also Paul Wellstone's media consultant. And Paul Wellstone -- anyone watching this who doesn't know who Paul Wellstone was should look him up. He tragically died in a plane crash about a week before -- 10 days before the 2002 Senate election. And he was about to prove that you can get re-elected to the Senate from Minnesota, even if you voted your conviction, and voted against [00:36:00] the Iraq War.

Her whole theory was as follows -- that 2004 would have played out like this: Wellstone could not have resisted getting in the race, even though he hadn't run in



2000, because of back problems. Because as an anti-war candidate. But he would have been too hot for the Democratic Party. So they would have gone with a slightly less hot candidate, who was also anti-war. The fiscally prudent former governor of Vermont, mainstream Democrat, Howard Dean. And -- no, in a lot of ways, Dean understood very early on that in a race where four candidates were for the Iraq War, [00:37:00] forget conviction. If you're the underfunded Howard Dean, being the fifth candidate for the Iraq War was not exactly the place to be. He understood what used to be called counterprogramming. Twenty, thirty years ago, a TV station up against the Super Bowl wouldn't put on other football tapes. They would run women's movies. Weepies. And that was sort of your model for counterprogramming.

And to some extent, to understand the Dean campaign of 2004 -- and I don't rule out that there could be a Dean campaign in 2016 -- is that more than any modern candidate, Dean instinctively understood counterprogramming, how to make yourself different than the people you were running against.

Q: Well, this sounds -- you started following him in summer of '02.

SHAPIRO: In the summer of '02.

Q: [00:38:00] The vote on the Iraq War was in October of '02. All the other Democrats vote to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

SHAPIRO: Right.

Q: Dean then sees an opening. But doesn't that contradict, in some sense, that when you decide to run for president, you've got to know why you're running, as part of that decision.

SHAPIRO: But I think, early on, while the vote was not until October, the fact that we were going into Iraq was obvious, ever since George W. Bush mentioned taxis -- went from Afghanistan to the axis of evil, of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, in his 2002 State of the Union message. So it wasn't as if this war was suddenly announced three months after Dean started running.

Q: When did -- as you're observing it, when did Dean break through, and become the phenomenon he was, [00:39:00] all through 2003?

SHAPIRO: March of 2003. I'm trying to -- there were a series of events, one cascading after another. There was a DNC speech. There was a speech in Iowa. There was just suddenly the fact that Dean was getting anti-war crowds. I can just still see the room of about 1,000 people. Grinnell College. When most candidates were hard-pressed to draw 100.

Q: And you mentioned in your book, a NARAL [National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League] speech.

SHAPIRO: Yes. But the... One of my memories -- we're here on the Upper West Side of New York at 86th and Broadway. And whenever I go to the airport, I go up Amsterdam. [00:40:00] And there's a youth hostel building at about 102nd and Amsterdam. And what I remember about that building is in January of 2003, Howard Dean, in New York



to do fundraising or TV, also stopped by the local Democratic club, as a speaker. And no one knew who he was. I think somebody introduced him as “John Dean.” No, actually, I think at one point, Tom Harkin referred -- the Senator from Iowa referred to Howard Dean as John Dean, the Watergate figure. But Dean spoke for about 10 minutes, and this partially Hispanic, partially Upper West Side Liberal Democratic group was profoundly uninterested. They rushed him off-stage, so they could bring out the salsa band that was going to provide entertainment. [00:41:00] And I just -- it is -- so, whenever I go by the youth hostel, here was a person who was getting 10,000 people at “Sleepless Summer” rallies six months later. And 40 Democrats in January were bored with him after eight minutes.

Q: You observed the Kerry campaign, during this period. You saw him fall from frontrunner status, rise again, toward the end of '03.

SHAPIRO: Well, I saw so many different John Kerry incarnations. First of all, John Kerry really -- the worst thing John Kerry -- I'm not sure how -- I'm not sure it played out in the general election, but the hardest thing for John Kerry [00:42:00] is that in 1998, when Bill Clinton didn't want to actually do much against Saddam Hussein, for various violations of the no-fly zone, Kerry, as an obedient Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sponsored a very toughly-worded resolution that the Clinton Administration dictated, that in essence said, “We are going to denounce Saddam Hussein in this resolution, to cover the fact that we're going to do almost nothing militarily.” But Kerry's name was on this resolution, that basically made all the Bush charges against Saddam -- you know, gassing the Marsh Arabs, threats -- working with terrorists. Threats [00:43:00] of weapons of mass destruction. And I've always thought, even though I can't -- I don't have proof of this - that more than anything, Kerry was so afraid of being accused of hypocrisy. If he voted against the 2002 resolution to go to war with Iraq, citing many of the same grounds that his resolution in 1998 used to justify, well, not doing anything.

And it was this desperate quest for consistency that led John Kerry to the total inconsistency. And I do have a memory, right before the South Carolina primary, of Kerry being at an outdoor rally, and being asked his position on the Iraq War. And I clocked it. The answer was five minutes and [00:44:00] 23 seconds. The fact is that Kerry had an exceedingly intricate position that said, “Well, I didn't really authorize him to go to war, I authorized him to only threaten war at the United Nations.” But that never flew. And that John Kerry -- his biggest problem, for the Democratic constituencies, was that on the key vote, he was on the wrong side of the issue. Even though so many of Kerry's other entire political history was Democratic, Liberal, and he came, of course, to fame, as a soldier, who denounced the Vietnam War.

So, there was that problem. There was also the problem of, if you're spending money too fast, and you're not raising money, eventually, you run out of the said money.



This is what also happened to John McCain [00:45:00] in 2007, that -- and in Kerry's case, he was out of money by November of 2003, which is why I mentioned earlier, this intricate -- the law -- the campaign laws -- even though he was married to Teresa Heinz, one of the wealthiest women in America, she could not give him money. She could legally give him \$2,000. Because unless the funds were joint, it would be treated as any donor. So you can imagine the frustration of a candidate, unable to pay vendors, unable to pay TV ads, with seven different homes (laughter), married to one of the richest women in America. And they -- as I recall, the Kerry campaign and a lot of election lawyers, [00:46:00] spent an awful lot of time, trying to figure out how much money could he claim that he owned, from the house they had in Louisburg Square in Boston, that he could then, in essence, take out a mortgage, or a loan against his share. And it's -- I'm doing this from memory again -- I think he raised for or five million dollars.

Q: Six point four. A significant amount for the campaign.

SHAPIRO: And what it did, is it paid for some of the best ads of the 2004 campaign. There was one ad that the Democratic media consultant, Jim Margolis did with a veteran of John Kerry's Swiftboat. Del Sandusky, that ends up with this very beefy, very Midwestern, very non-elite guy, saying about John Kerry, "This is a good man." And it was done with conviction. And I'm convinced [00:47:00] that that ad, more than any single factor, is why Kerry won the Iowa caucuses.

In February and March, as Kerry is wrapping up the nomination, Jim Margolis and Bob Shrum, the other media consultant, got into a high-minded dispute over what percentage of the nine percent of the media buy that was their collective fee would go to each of them. And, as Joe Klein recounts in his book on campaign -- his denunc-- his [inaudible] against campaign consultants, *Paradise Lost*, that I believe came out in 2006, the result was, Margolis left the campaign, Shrum got his nine percent. Shrum and his partners got their nine percent, that was eventually negotiated [00:48:00] down to four and a half percent. And after the [Dell Sandusky?] ad, John Kerry never made another ad that was anything other than TV wallpaper.

Q: You've got a quotation from Kerry in your book, the publication of which precedes the famous, "I voted for the war --"

SHAPIRO: Yes, oh yeah.

Q: "-- against it." The quote is, I'm the only person running for president who has fought in a war, and actually fought against the war I volunteered to fight in, because I found it wrong. I mean, that -- structurally, that seems to me the same kind of --

SHAPIRO: That is the same --

Q: -- statement.

SHAPIRO: -- yes. I mean, they're --

Q: Which he hadn't made yet, at the time you wrote this book.



SHAPIRO: Which he hadn't made yet. No. (laughter) And -- because, again, the book came out - the real edition -- there was an afterword written for the Democratic Convention, but the book itself closed -- was published in the first couple of [00:49:00] days of November of 2003. The thing about Kerry -- and despite the fact that he chose John Edwards as his running mate, I was always fascinated by the fact that they both -- and this is my extrapolation from lots of conversation fragments with both of them -- that each of them represented to the other the exact worst thing about American politics. John Kerry, who came to the Senate in 1980, and was -- '82, forgive me -- and was seen as almost a parody of ambition. Before there was Chuck Schumer, it was never get between John Kerry and a TV camera.

Kerry always prided himself on the fact that he waited -- even though he might have run in '92, [00:50:00] he might have run in 2000. He waited 22 years after he arrived in the Senate to run for president. And that was -- it was honoring the traditions of the Senate. It was not -- he was playing against type, for all my purported ambition, I am a man who understands that you just don't show up and start running for president. Unlike John Edwards, who arrives in the Senate in 1998, and is already on Gore's Vice Presidential shortlist in 1999, and was unequivocally running for the presidency, from the moment he arrived in the United States Senate.

For Edwards -- and remember, this is the Edwards pre-Rielle Hunter, pre-scandal. John Edwards did see himself as the son of a millworker. A self-made man, who went to, as I recall, North Carolina State, and [00:51:00] like so many presidential candidates before him, majored in textiles. (laughter) And for him, John Kerry related on the [Forbes?] side, way back to New England aristocracy, and on his father's side, a couple of generations of State Department officials. The man who went to Yale, Skull and Bones, the -- that John Kerry represented every way in which American politics is a rigged game, where people who are well-born, and go to Yale, and are at the right clubs get to run the country. So I've always found -- and both of these critiques were right, on a certain level. But I always found that tension to be fascinating.

Q: Before we leave the period of your book, is there anything else you have to say about John -- I'm sorry, I was about to make the Tom Harkin mistake -- about Howard Dean and his campaign?

SHAPIRO: Well, just the fact that, to some extent, there was a mismatch between what Howard Dean became, and Howard Dean himself. That Joe Trippi was a great master, who is, by the way, Dean's second campaign manager. Rick Ritter was the first. That in Trippi's mind, it became something that -- the campaign represented something that Howard Dean really wasn't. That Howard Dean was really not an avatar of [00:53:00] a radical change in the Democratic Party. He was a very smart guy, who got bored with being Vermont governor. It couldn't run forever. Didn't want to go to the



foundation world. Didn't want to go to Wall Street. And really liked the idea of public service. Thought the fact that he was a doctor, that he would understand healthcare reform was a big selling point. And that he was a balanced-budget Democrat. But it also had an instinctive, non-interventionist feeling about politics.

But the idea that Howard Dean was this sort of embodiment of a new politics, just was a mismatch between the candidate, and the perception. I mean, this happened before. Eugene McCarthy in 1968 was really -- while he had the courage to challenge Lyndon Johnson, there was so much else that was [00:54:00] put onto McCarthy wasn't there. And in the case of the Dean campaign -- and this gets into the problem with insurgency. First of all, there was a real tension between Howard Dean's original loyalist -- particularly his chief aide, Kate O'Connor, and all of the new people who came into the campaign in 2003, who did not have a pre-existing relationship with Dean.

But there was also the sense -- and this is the problem with insurgent campaigns. So many decisions were made on the fly. So much was being done by too few people with too little sleep, that sometimes the decisions were less than impeccable. A perfect example is the Sunday before the Iowa caucuses. For reasons I do not understand, [00:55:00] the Dean people had been led to believe that they would get Jimmy Carter's endorsement, if they went to Plains, Georgia. Dean, the day before -- I'm doing this from memory. The day before the Iowa caucuses, flies -- there is no direct flight between Des Moines and Plains, Georgia. (laughter) And basically wastes 12 hours of campaigning to meet with Carter. I think, maybe watch him teach Sunday school, and not get an endorsement. You know, this is the sort of mistake that insurgent campaigns make. I'm not saying that those 12 hours would have made a difference. Because Dean did finish a bad third in Iowa. But it would have amounted to something.

But so much of this, the idea of -- [00:56:00] because they could do massive rallies in the summer of 2003; there were no benefits to getting 50,000 people in Seattle in 2003. You're a year before Seattle's primary or caucus -- I guess Washington State had a caucus, back then. I don't even think they had a system for collecting names from people at these rallies. It was just sort of, having rallies for the sake of having rallies. Because when suddenly the internet hit the spigot, and -- all under the old system, all of these internet small contributions were matched one to one by the Federal Government--the Dean campaign had more money than it knew how to spend prudently.

This also led to lots of tensions within the Dean campaign, between Joe Trippi [00:57:00] and, as I said, the few original Dean people, like his aide, Kate O'Connor,



who was a nice woman, but stretched beyond her capabilities by just wanting to be protective of Dean, and do everything herself, and not understanding the dimensions of the presidential campaign.

But there are some unfairnesses. I have never -- I thought the Dean scream -- and, as I recall, Diane Sawyer, for the morning she was on, actually did the best exegesis of this about two or three weeks after the Iowa caucuses. First of all, in the way everything has now become encapsulated, people say, "Oh, Dean lost the Iowa caucuses [00:58:00] because of the Dean scream." No, the Dean scream came after Howard Dean finished third in the Iowa caucuses, trying to rally his troops. But as I recall, the problem was, the TV networks had just put in noise-cancelling microphones. So even though the scene in the Dean rally site was raucous, and Dean was screaming partially to be heard, the noise-cancelling microphones pretty much got rid of the background noise, so it was like Howard Dean was screaming like a madman in a totally silent room.

Also, what nobody picked up on is one of the -- as Dean ticks off all the states they were going to, with louder and louder voices, this is a variant of something he'd been doing in his stump speech for a year. [00:59:00] All the countries that have national healthcare, and America doesn't. We're going to Iowa, we're going to Wisconsin, we're going to fight in Washington State. We're going to Oregon. They have healthcare in Paraguay, they have healthcare in Portugal. It was adapting, if you will, a refrain that had worked for him in a different setting.

So that's an aspect of Dean. And the aspect that goes back to insurgent campaigns is, ultimately, you can't do an entire presidential campaign with a lack of sleep. That eventually -- it undid McCain in 2000, where he -- in the South Carolina primary, where, as I recall, he declared war against Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, which is not normally [01:00:00] the thing that you do if you're going from New Hampshire, where you've just won by 20 points, into South Carolina, where Robertson and Falwell were, shall we say, perhaps a little more popular than, uh, the typical secular New Hampshire voter might lead you to think.

And it happened, to some extent, with Santorum, Rick Santorum, coming out of the miraculous win in the Iowa caucuses. In 2012, I was there, when -- flew to New Hampshire for his first event. It was in a senior citizens' retirement home that -- and it was -- Rick Santorum, instead of setting up a major rally, they had booked this in advance, because it was -- they thought it was a safe crowd, they can get a couple hundred senior citizens, because it was a retirement home. And [01:01:00] the day after Rick Santorum surprised the entire country, here he is in New Hampshire, taking as one of his first questions, a question on raising the social security retirement age.



And Santorum goes off on a very factual riff, as if he's still the House member from the Pittsburgh area. That includes this great thing: "Ronald Reagan was wrong. We never should have raised the retirement age as part of the 1986..." If there's ever a sentence no Republican should say after they've just won the Iowa caucuses, it is not, "Ronald Reagan was wrong." (laughter)

But these are the mistakes that insurgent candidates make. And it is one of the reasons why, even when the insurgents can end up [01:02:00] having as much money, or more money than their rivals, as Dean did, in 2004, that ultimately don't get the nomination.

Q: You know, before we leave Dean, your old boss, Charlie Peters used to talk about and write about the Winter Palace syndrome. People in Washington pass laws, and like the czar and czarina in the Winter Palace, think that the world is changing. A governor like Dean, you point out in your book, kind of saw how No Child Left Behind was working at the grassroots. Knew that at the grassroots, gun control was a losing issue, in most parts of the country, for a Democrat. Were there -- but he was the only governor in the race, after a period in which governors had won every election but one since Carter in '76. Did the Democrats suffer, for not having a richer pool of contenders, whose experience was outside the Winter Palace, so to speak?

SHAPIRO: [01:03:00] I'm not sure -- I mean, it's... It's real hard, because 2004 was the election of the Iraq War. And to my mind -- I'm skipping ahead a little. The emblematic voter in 2004, the voter that explains the entire election to me, was a woman I met at a debate party, put on -- she worked as a nurse in a large-practice medical office in Des Moines. And I had arranged to go to, after, I think the vice presidential debate in 2004, after Edwards somehow managed to lose to Dick Cheney, which is still one of the great facts of our time, the great trial lawyer losing to the most unappealing man at the upper echelons of American politics in the last half-century. But [01:04:00] the point was, I remember her saying that she was a 30-year-old nurse, working in -- and she said, "I really like John Kerry's medical plan. I like John Kerry personally. I have a 10-year-old son, and I'm really worried about him going to war. And I don't think we should change presidents in the middle of a war." She voted for Bush.

Bush, by the way, I believe, carried Iowa by 4,000 votes. And while it wasn't pivotal the way Ohio was, that whole idea, that this was an election about Iraq, but Iraq cut both ways. It cut both the anti-Iraq passions on the part of most of the Democratic Party. But it also, coming three years after 9/11, it also spoke to a lot of very nervous citizens, saying, "We can't [01:05:00] change presidents in the middle of a war." So, against that backdrop -- and this is the longest answer possible -- I don't think a governor necessarily would have fit into that model in 2004, the way governors fit into 1992, 1980.

Q: Two thousand.



SHAPIRO: Two thousand -- yes.

Q: Do you have any other observations about John Kerry, as a candidate?

SHAPIRO: Yeah. I think John Kerry's biggest mistake was firing the guy -- or allowing a situation to develop in which the guy who did the best ads, to put John Kerry in the best light, Jim Margolis, left the campaign in February or March of 2004. What people forget about 2004, [01:06:00] which was how close it was. That, had Kerry gotten 119,000 more votes in Ohio, he would have won the election. It was that close. That Ohio would have given him an Electoral College majority, even though he lost by three million votes in the popular vote. But the main reason he lost the popular vote so badly is Karl Rove and company, aware that the moral argument that Al Gore had, coming out of 2000, that he won the popular vote, therefore, simultaneously ran ads on national cable television, to get out the Republican base, run up the vote totals in places like Texas.

So at one point -- and I don't have the numbers here; I'm doing this from memory, and it's not on the books, so there's not -- [01:07:00] I believe that a million to a million and a half of the three million vote Bush margin, was the fact that the Bush campaign was trying to maximize his popular vote, and the Kerry campaign was only focused on electoral votes. So what I'm trying to say is that 2004 was much closer than people remember it. And the Kerry people, much like the Romney people in 2012, totally believed that they were going to win.

I had a very good off-the-record source, who was sitting in the front of the plane with Kerry, and who would not speak to me at Kerry rallies, said, "I don't want anyone to see me talking to the press, but here's my cell phone number." So, I remember, [01:08:00] we'd be 100 feet apart, and having cell phone conversations that were totally off-the-record, which is why I'm not going to give his name now. But the point was, he was totally convinced that Kerry was going to win. Other sources I had, inside the Kerry campaign were totally convinced that Kerry was going to win.

In 2004, Jeff Greenfield and other people have always organized an Election Day lunch in New York, which consists of some of the network anchors, people like Jill Abramson, who now the editor of the *Times*, is a regular. It's about 30, 40 people. And in 2004, Tom Brokaw brought Newt Gingrich, because Newt Gingrich was going to do on-the-air commentary that night for NBC. And as we're sitting there, the [01:09:00] early leaked exit polls come out of maybe 1:00, [inaudible]. And the early - - and this was the year the exit polls were just grotesquely wrong, particularly the first wave. And these numbers have Kerry running, even in South Carolina, sweeping everything. Mickey Kaus ended up calling this Kerry euphoria the seven-hour presidency, which I've always loved. But I remembered Newt just going off on, "I told



Rove. I told Bush. They're doing it wrong. We should have won this election, but they blew it." (laughter)

But what I'm trying to say is, looking back on the Kerry campaign, you can do lots of things he should have done. Another example is, the mantra for the Democratic Convention in [01:10:00] Boston is, do not criticize Bush. We're not going to have anything like Ann Richards, talking about "born on third base, and thinks he hit a triple." None of that. We're going to be above the fray. We're not going to have any criticism of the incumbent president, whatsoever.

Then the Republican Party convention starts off with the most, biggest evisceration of John Kerry by his Senate colleague, Democrat Zell Miller of Georgia. So the idea that somehow criticizing the other party at a convention -- I have no idea why the Kerry people got this. But let me tell you a true story -- as opposed to the fake stories I've been telling you. No. (laughter) But I've worked for Jimmy Carter, and I remember -- and Carter spoke at the 2004 Boston convention. [01:11:00] And Carter was exercised over the Iraq War. And wanted to deliver a very harsh critique of Bush's war-making decisions. Carter was speaking not in the real prime-time, but sort of fringe time, but still. It was a former President of the United States. And Jerry Rafshoon, who had been Communications Director for Carter, and was sort of operating as Carter's emissary to the Kerry campaign, was told, "Please tell the President he has to tone down the Bush critiques. We're just not doing this." And Rafshoon said, and I remember Rafshoon telling me this, "President Carter would love to hear Senator Kerry tell him that personally. But until President Carter hears that from Senator Kerry, there is going to be no changes in the speech whatsoever." [01:12:00] So actually, if you go back and look at the transcript of the 2004 Democratic convention, the toughest speech against Bush was probably given by Jimmy Carter.

But there was a whole series of John Kerry errors. The biggest one was not drawing the right lesson from Howard Dean. The right lesson from Howard Dean is, that Howard Dean proved that internet fundraising can do amazing things. But what happened is, Kerry could not believe that once he became the de facto nominee, he, too, would hit a gusher of anti-Bush, small-donor Democratic fundraising. So they planned the entire campaign on the [01:13:00] basis of, a, he accepted Federal money for the fall campaign. John Kerry did not understand the lesson of Howard Dean and internet fundraising. That they were totally worried, on how they would pay for the campaign, between the point at which Kerry was the de facto nominee in March, and the Democratic convention. Traditionally, this was the point where soft money would pay for everything. But there was no more soft money, because of McCain-Feingold. And therefore, Kerry was very frugal about spending anything. It is one of the reasons, if I'm doing this from memory, why they were so slow to respond to the



Swiftboat ads. Because they didn't borrow money, even though they could have, at that point, borrowed a lot of money legitimately, as many campaigns have. But they were so totally afraid that they could never raise enough money [01:14:00]. And then the money started coming in like a gusher, from internet giving, in the summer of 2004, before the Democratic Convention, when Kerry can still accept small-donor gifts. But by that point, they had made the decision to farm out the get-out-the-vote operation to independent 527 groups that had been formed by Democrats, to try to get around the McCain-Feingold limitations by using another wrinkle of the campaign law. So there was -- I think the group was ACT, Americans Coming Together.

And what that meant is that John Kerry was running one kind of campaign in Ohio. But the actual getting-out-the-vote in Ohio was sub-contracted to these Democratic 527 [01:15:00] groups. And they did what Democrats have always done in Ohio. They focused on the seven urban counties, and they hit every turnout target, and exceeded their turnout targets. There was only one problem. The Bush campaign, confident of their money all the way through, was running an organic campaign, doing everything in-house. And the Bush campaign also realized -- and I remember having long talks, both before and after the campaign, with a guy named Rob [Peduchik?], who ran Bush Ohio 2004, that they were doing everything in-house, which gave them -- that meant that they knew exactly what was going on, and they quickly realized that if they could win a county 70-28, instead of 68-32, [01:16:00] you get more votes that way. And therefore, Bush did better -- while Kerry did better than expected in the seven urban counties of Ohio, Bush did better than expected in the rest of the state. And that was enough to give George Bush a 119,000-vote margin, and the White House for four more years.

As long as we've gotten into this, we'll go one step further. Issue number one, the gay marriage initiative that was on the Ohio ballot. First of all, you have to realized how unpopular [01:18:00] gay marriage was in 2004, as opposed to late 2013, when we're having this conversation. But the fact is, that if I'm -- again, I'm doing this from memory, but I'm pretty sure I'm right [01:17:00] -- Karl Rove was very nervous about getting anything into the mix in Ohio that would upset the status quo. But Ken Blackwell, the Conservative Secretary of State, who was planning a gubernatorial campaign in 2006, was really militantly anti-gay marriage, and saw putting an initiative on the ballot, issue number one, as his ticket to the governorship in 2006. Parenthetically, he ended up being very badly beaten by Ted Strickland, but I digress.

As a result, at the very last minute, just barely with enough petition signatures, Gay Marriage was on the ballot along with Kerry and Bush in November of 2004, in Ohio. Now, I've gotten into many debates, and people have looked, by precinct, by precinct, and have argued whether or not this made a difference. [01:18:00] I think -- by doing



reporting at the time -- I think the gay marriage initiative affected turnout in one important way. Ministers are not allowed to organize for a candidate from the pulpit. It would -- a church can lose their non-profit tax status. There is one exception to that. Ministers can preach all they want on non-partisan ballot initiatives, like gay marriage.

Issue number one in Ohio allowed the creation -- and I went to some of their meetings -- of a consortium of about a couple of hundred conservative ministers from all denominations, from Catholics to some [01:19:00] AME Baptist churches. In Cleveland, evangelical Protestant churches. I mean, there was elaborate outrage, and ministerial coordination campaign, which is totally legal, because this was a non-partisan ballot initiative. My own theory is, that raised turnout just enough, and maybe depressed a little of the Kerry black folk maybe by one percent in places like Cuyahoga County, that it was enough to give Bush the presidency.

I can't prove this statistically, but everyone says, "Well, gay marriage was unpopular; it didn't really matter in other states." The only state where gay marriage mattered was the only state that ultimately mattered in 2004, which was Ohio.

Q: You know, we haven't talked very much about [01:20:00] John Edwards, who --

SHAPIRO: Oh, I'm -- words cannot describe. Since my coverage of John Edwards -- and I've written this -- has been a bit of a personal embarrassment. There is a famous scene in the middle of the Bob Woodward book on Iran-Contra, in which Bill Casey, the maverick CIA director, rogue director, is tracked down, supposedly by Woodward in his hospital bed, as he's dying from a stroke. And Woodward somehow gets him to answer one question: why did you do this? And Casey says, "I believed." I fear I'm that way about the whole John Edwards, son-of-a-millworker, two Americas.

Q: Well, but he was a phenomenon in that campaign. He went from being [01:21:00] a first-term senator to the runner-up in the Democratic presidential nomination, to a place on the national ballot. So there's something there to --

SHAPIRO: There was something there. And this -- other people have theories about Joe Lieberman that, being the vice presidential nominee in 2000 really changed him. That it gave Lieberman a sense of entitlement. It made him used to having entourages. It made him used to being -- Secret Service protection, that once you have it, it's hard to live without. And there are -- and Lord knows, I've had enough "where did we go wrong?" sessions with people very close to Edwards, particularly from 2004 and 2008. And a common theory is that being Kerry's vice president in 2004 [01:22:00] changed him. Remember the Rielle Hunter scandal. They met somewhere in the fall of 2005, as he's getting ready to run for 2008. And there's part of me that would like to believe that I correctly judged John Edwards in 2004, and it only turned out to be wrong in retrospect, when he reacted badly to temptation, and then made a series of awful choices, while his wife was dying of cancer.



That was so upsetting to me, I'm going to take -- (drinks water)

Q: (laughs)

SHAPIRO: Thus refreshed, we will go back to John Edwards. [01:23:00] Now, one of the things about -- as a journalist, I'm very scrupulous about is off-the-record. And my original connection with John Edwards was that my wife, Meryl Gordon, a journalist, profiled him for *Elle* magazine shortly after the first vice presidential speculation, in April of 2001. And Meryl said to me, "You really ought to go see this guy. He's really interesting." So I'm going to ask you to unplug me, because I have a visual aid that I will get.

Q: OK. (break in audio)

SHAPIRO: I promised you a visual aid. And here it is. He holds up the picture. This is John Edwards, beach shore of South Carolina, 2001 [01:24:00]. I am in the background. This was taken by Edwards' campaign photographer, personal staff photographer, and it says, "To Walter. Great shot of you, John Edwards." J. Edwards. And I have gone from having it on the wall in the adjoining room, to taking it down and putting it back in the closet, to feeling like, oh, my God, this is like Stalin airbrushing generals out of World War II pictures, and bringing it back.

But the relevant point that I was making was that I started following Edwards as a political phenomenon, in the summer of 2001. One of the more amazing dinners I had as a reporter is my wife and I had an off-the-record dinner with John and Elizabeth Edwards, at a restaurant [01:25:00] in Washington. We split the check -- called Olive's about two and a half weeks after 9/11. And my problem -- my feeling about off-the-record dinners is, it didn't occur to me to go back from an off-the-record dinner and type up my notes, in case, to have them in 30 or 40 years, where there's no embargo. So, while I remember the dinner a bit, it is amazing how much I don't remember about my off-the-record dinner with John Edwards three weeks after 9/11.

But the point is, my book, in a lot of ways, started with -- my wife and I went along as reporters on Edwards' second trip to New Hampshire of his life, which was in July of 2002 [01:26:00]. And watching Edwards in this environment, and watching -- realizing that this was New Hampshire living room politics. You know, talking to 50 or 100 Democrats, under the guise of campaigning for the New Hampshire state ticket, even though hitherto, he had not been terribly interested in New Hampshire state ticket, being a North Carolina Senator. It just really allowed me to see his appeal close-up. And it was quite impressive.

I also remember in something like December of 2002, when they were trying to set up the rules for trying suspects for Military commissions, and John Ashcroft came before



the Senate Judiciary Committee, on which Edwards was a junior member[01:27:00]. And I remember just watching. And because Edwards was a junior member, it was like six hours into the hearing. The cameras had gone home. People had filed their stories, before Edwards got a chance to question Ashcroft. And I remember him just eviscerating Ashcroft on just a series of simple libertarian points. Now, you're saying is, "What if?" And it was just one of the most impressive bits of questioning I had seen before or since by a United States Senator. Because generally, United States Senators are in the Joe Biden variety, where, of the 30-minute question period, 24 minutes are allocated to the questions, and six minutes might be allocated to the answer. But this was John Edwards, the courtroom questioner.

And it is that moment of, [01:28:00] I do think there was something about social class in America, that for all his big houses, that John Edwards did get. I mean, there was a large amount of slick phoniness about him, such as his anti-poverty institute, sort of died as soon as it was no longer an issue for him. But I also saw the idea that, I think it's conceivable that he could have been the strongest candidate against Bush in 2004. And I know Elizabeth Edwards believed it. Because it was almost, John is the only person who can beat George Bush, and we have to beat George Bush. And both on the record and off the record, that was her mantra, pushing him forward.

Q: Why, then do you think he was [01:29:00] ineffective in the vice presidential debate? And I would say, generally, disappointing to the Kerry campaign, throughout the fall.

SHAPIRO: I don't have a full answer. But I can maybe give you five partial theories. Number one, the Kerry campaign, going back to my point earlier about the convention, was always, never hit Bush hard, always -- never hit Cheney hard. Always be deferential. And I think that mucked up Edwards's rhythm. Number two, I think he was really having difficulty taking instruction from anyone. I think number three, the natural antipathy between Kerry and Edwards that I talked about beforehand also affected the relationship. And the fact that Edwards was not really allowed to [01:30:00] have his own advisors, this is traditional. That vice presidents are handed their own advisors. That's one of the reasons why, shall we say, there was a mismatch between such people as Steve Schmidt from the 2008 McCain campaign and Sarah Palin, which was the basic plot of *Game Change*. But all of this contributed to this, and maybe that John Edwards just didn't do his homework enough.

Q: We haven't talked very much about George Bush, but do you have any observations about his campaign, or his candidacy, more generally?

SHAPIRO: Well, I have a general rule, that you learn almost nothing about incumbent presidents, by either hanging around their campaign, or -- because we really know who they are from [01:31:00] the way they ran for president the first time, and the way they've governed. So I spent exceedingly little time around the Bush campaign, and in fact, I did something journalistically I'm very proud of. Forgive me the self-congratulation. You can hear the trumpets in the background. And soon the sky rockets will come off.



That, during -- I was a columnist for *USA Today* during the 2004 campaign. And even though the Republican convention was here in New York, I -- after the first -- the Monday morning, I flew to Ohio, and spent the next four days interviewing people in diners and cafes, about what they felt about what they had seen on television. That was my rebellion against the syncopated nature of most political conventions [01:32:00], and the fact that they're lifeless TV shows. And I wish I had had the courage to do it more often. Because in some ways, that was the best reporting.

So I was not -- I was very close to the Kerry people. I did not have the same Bush sources. And it's made -- it may have contributed to the fact that journalists are all -- campaign reporters are always so eager to get into the room. If they could only -- if I only can get beyond spin, and find out what they believed honestly. In the case of the Kerry campaign, one would have beliefs, found out suddenly, that turned out not to be true. That John Kerry was going to be the next President of the United States. You -- had you gotten that same access to the Romney campaign. In the closing days of 2012. You would have gotten the same message.

So one of the things that I've learned from my mistake[01:33:00] is that, no matter how good your sources are in one campaign, you have to buttress them against all sorts of other information, because people can sincerely believe things that just happen not to be true. But I really have no blinding insights about the 2004 Bush campaign, except for the simple reason that if Karl Rove was one of the great political geniuses of our time, normally, political geniuses do not win re-election for their candidate by 119,000 votes, the margin in Ohio.

Q: Well -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

SHAPIRO: Yeah. And I've always thought that a better Kerry campaign would have beaten him.

Q: Hm. There is -- I want to get to the [01:34:00] subject of your observations about the media and politics, and so on. But before that, there's a that I'll read to you, and ask you to elaborate on. "The rhythms of political careers mean that men often seek the presidency at an age when they're grappling with the death of a parent," something that has, as far as I know, never been written about otherwise.

SHAPIRO: Well, I got this idea that, in 1994, Bill Clinton's mother, Virginia Clinton, died. And two or three days later, Clinton was off to a NATO summit. And I remember being told that -- and the fact is, the press treated the death of his mother as a two-day story. And then Clinton [01:35:00] was off to the NATO summit. And somebody in the Clinton national security firmament -- I was on that trip. It was a NATO summit in Brussels. The woman Prime Minister of Turkey, whose name escapes me, asked the President of the United States in one of those moments at the NATO summit, "Are you faking it? I know your mother just died." And he said yes. And that has really stayed with me. That -- first of all, most of political reporters are people in their late twenties and thirties. And they really cannot imagine the death of a parent, for the



most part, because their parents are quite vigorous and 58 years old. So therefore, it's only news -- "He will cancel campaigning for the next three days [01:36:00] because of..." So I was sensitized to this. And I'm sure, if you ask Bill Clinton now, name the three big events in 1994, he will talk about the congressional election, where Newt Gingrich won back the House; and he will also probably talk about his mother -- the death of his mother. But if you look at the Bill Clinton clips from 1994, the death of his mother was about the 738th most important thing that happened.

In 2002, I'm spending two days with John Kerry, as he's campaigning for Democrats in Maine. And part of the trick of the Kerry campaign is everyone who was spending time with him got to see him do a stunt. My wife, who later profiled him for *New York* magazine, was offered a motorcycle ride. [01:37:00] I am on my way -- I know we're taking a private plane, from -- actually, I'm just remembering. We are drifting -- I'm driving out with Kerry from his house on Louisburg Square, the one that soon was going to be mortgaged to save his campaign, and we're driving -- I'm in a van with him. He's being driven to the -- whatever the private airport is. And he points out a Mormon church, and says, "You know, that's Mitt Romney's church." But I knew -- I could just see this -- he says, "If we had more time, I would show you the Lexington and Concord trail." And next thing we know, we're at the airport. I think -- I've traveled in an awful lot of small planes with candidates. And I'm always -- every reporter who's done this is always afraid of being listed in the next morning's newspaper in the paragraph [01:38:00] that begins, "Also aboard, colon..." (laughter) But that's about my only concern.

And David Wade, who was then his personal aide, is now the Chief of Staff for the Secretary of State, says something about, "Well, we'll try not to do any barrel rolls on the way in." But I just sort of joked -- I just think it's just a joke. And then we get on the plane, and I realize that unless Massachusetts is a fly-on-the-left state, John Kerry is not sitting in the co-pilot seat; he's sitting in the pilot's seat. So there is John Kerry, flying me to New Hampshire. And I am really thinking about the "Also aboard" paragraph. (laughter) And as we're lining up for a landing [01:39:00] in Concord -- I guess we were going to New Hampshire, and then to Maine. As we were lining up for a landing in Concord, the cell phone in Kerry's pocket goes off.

Now, I have strong feelings about taxi drivers talking on the cell phone. So I'm saying to myself, I'm doing this little prayer, "Please, God, don't let him answer it." He answers it, says, "I'm landing the plane, I'll have to call you back." He lands the plane. This would be a total story of a self-indulgent risk-seeker, who would have the temerity to answer a ringing cell phone, while he's landing the plane, except, as he explains to me, it was his sister calling. Their mother was in critical condition. She had just been calling from the bedside. She had just met with the doctor. [01:40:00]



His mother died during the course of that campaign. And it was also at a point where Dick Gephardt's mother, who was in her nineties, was very, very sick. And Joe Lieberman's mother, while she died a year or two later, was very vigorous at 91.

But I remember -- and it's -- my last conversation, really, personal conversation with Kerry was after the book came out. My father died that -- the May of 2004. And out of the blue, I'm sitting here at that roll-top across the room, and the phone rings. I pick it up. It is John Kerry on the other end, just to offer condolences. Because there is a certain generational sense of, you get it. You really get that there are personal things going on that are different than merely trying to cover up an affair with Rielle Hunter [01:41:00], that really are shaping the way people approach the world. And it is one of those things that I'm still fascinated by, these sorts of losses.

You know, the fact is, right now, against the backdrop of the botched roll-out of healthcare reform, no one mentions that Kathleen Sebelius's father, John Gilligan, died in the last couple of months. You know, we are -- we sort of separate out -- we -- it's a fascinating thing. Political figures have no privacy for sex scandals. We have elaborate theories about who they are, as people. We are -- Bill [Clinton]-- you know, you can spend weeks -- I once suggested that somebody endow a university department called Hillary Studies. And you could have the psychological theories out the wazoo. [01:42:00] But when something really wrenching in the life of a public figure happens, it is almost treated as a distraction from the main story, rather than the real story. And I'm sorry I happened to hit it, and obviously since my father was 94 and 95 during the course of my covering the campaign, I may have been more sensitive than most. But it surprises me that it still is an uncharacteristic awareness that is not widely shared. And, but again, the -- and this is a way to say that I was thinking about, during one of our breaks, a larger point that I really wanted to make, which is that it is the mistake that [01:43:00] candidates make in being totally sheltered from the press, which is the Hillary, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney approach to press management. It's everything's on message, and you give as few -- as little access as humanly possible. And that is, that you totally forget that these candidates are human beings. And it is, I'm not sure I got, had John Kerry been president, I'm not sure I would have had deep insights into his presidency, based on all the time I spent with him. But I do think even now, as he's Secretary of State, I have a better understanding of who John Kerry is as a person, for having spent all of that time with him in 2002 and 2003. The same is for Howard Dean. The two people from the 2004 roster [01:44:00] who may have another act in American politics ahead of them.

Q: Well can you give -- I'm trying to, it's a fascinating observation, deeply fascinating, but I wonder, can you think of ways in which suffering these personal transitions, crises, whatever we want to call them, affected these individuals? That they were different



because of the death of a parent, or dealing with the looming health crises of a parent.

SHAPIRO: I'm trying, I'm just doing a couple of -- and this is all speculation. I think the complexity of Bill Clinton is such that I'm not even going-- even though I've spent a lot of time thinking about Bill Clinton and covering him since 1992, I'm not sure I have an answer there. But the same [01:45:00] with Kerry. I always had a sense about Kerry, and this may be because of seeing him up close during the last years of his mother's life and afterwards, is that John Kerry was one of the rare people in American public life who is a slight depressive. That, you know, I'm not trying to do, I'm not trying to "have couch, will travel," I'm not trying to practice psychotherapy without a license, and I mean depressive not in a clinical sense, but in sort of the way a novelist might call somebody a depressive. But I always thought that there was a certain mournful air to Kerry that I've seen. No one would have called John Kerry the happy warrior. Which is of course the great phrase that Franklin Delano Roosevelt called Al Smith. [01:46:00] And I don't think John Kerry could ever campaign on what Hubert Humphrey called the politics of joy. So in that sense, yes, I -- it maybe deepens you, it maybe gives you more empathy. It maybe makes you realize that ambition is not the be all and the end all of everything. I think certainly in thinking about Hillary, and as we're talking now, I have no idea whether she's going to run in 2016 or not. The fact that her mother died the last couple of years, another transition that was rarely mentioned in all of the hundreds of profiles of Hillary Clinton. Maybe a small factor of having people realize there's more to life than just sort of naked ambition. But again, it's -- [01:47:00] these are human beings, and you get some access, and going back to the lesson of my being deceived by John Edwards, there is a danger of thinking that you know someone based on some access.

Let me give you a perfect example. I first got to know John McCain when he was national chairman for Phil Gramm for President in the '95, 1996 -- 1995, and a colleague said, "You ought to call McCain. Unlike most of these people, he's really involved with the Gramm campaign and he will talk to you about it." So during this period, well I was a *USA Today* columnist, I got in the habit of having one or two lunches or breakfasts in the Senate dining room with McCain a year. [01:48:00] You know, I was probably one of 150 reporters he had similar relationships with. But because McCain also had the self-confidence to do these events without aides, I probably, at the point at which John McCain became the Republican nominee in 2008, I probably spent more time alone with John McCain than anyone in American political life who had ever received a presidential nomination. And probably even more than Howard Dean, who I spent an awful lot of time with. And how John McCain behaved as a political candidate, from the moment he got the nomination, through Sarah Palin, through the debates, through the loss of 2008, to being the hyper-conservative as he's running, worried about Senate reelection in 2010, [01:49:00] I have nev -- it was a



person I never recognized -- and the point here is -- and I'd also seen McCain on -- during the whole New Hampshire, South Carolina, I was on his bus in 2000, where he set new records for access to the press. Where he would do five- and six-hour rolling press conferences. And I always thought that if McCain had won the South Carolina primary in 2000, he would have won the 2000 Republican nomination rather than Bush, and the whole model of how you react to the press would have been totally etched. Because politics is, more than anything, a copycat profession. And if a candidate had prospered by being that in public, that open, that we might have set a whole different model of how you run for president.

So what doing all of this has taught me [01:50:00] is a certain degree of humility. A certain degree that they're both people, but as a reporter, there's a level at which you're never going to know them. And all of your theories, oh yeah, yeah, I was just -- had lunch with McCain last week, I've got him all figured out -- do not create the person who would pick Sarah Palin as a running mate.

Q: You know, something along this line of sort of empathy, and this may be a dry well, but you -- your --

SHAPIRO: Empathy with me, yes, a dry well. (laughter)

Q: You, unlike most reporters, unlike maybe all reporters, ran for office.

SHAPIRO: Well there's one other exception, Chris Matthews.

Q: Of course, that's right. But we're talking to Walter Shapiro now. And were there things that you experienced as a candidate back in -- [01:51:00]

SHAPIRO: Nineteen seventy-two.

Q: -- 1972, challenging, as I recall, the Democratic incumbent.

SHAPIRO: Oh no, it was a winnable seat in Michigan. I was a 25-year-old University of Michigan student, and I was running against the floor leader of the state house, who had gerrymandered the district to his specifications. And I was running against, with no money, I was running against the UAW in Michigan. At its high point.

Q: Well, the question is, were there things that you experienced as a candidate that gave you a certain depth of field when you looked at these presidential candidates? Or is that just chasing a rabbit down a hole?

SHAPIRO: No it's not, because I've thought about it a lot. That on a certain level, I like politicians more than I think most of my colleagues do. There are exceptions to that, you know, there's the standard [01:52:00] "the only way a reporter should look at a politician is down." But, I think they're flawed people like all of us. There are some grotesque charlatans. There's some people who have charlatan qualities but also have sincere qualities. And I still think that was John Edwards. No one is a saintly figure, the way Obama was portrayed by too many people who should have known better in 2007 and 2008. Nor is anyone as villainous as George W. Bush was portrayed by too many reporters during the last four or five years of his presidency. So, there is a moment which -- but there's one other thing I carried away from it, which is just at the other



end of it. [01:53:00] The danger of being a politician is that every single human encounter becomes transactional. If you say good morning to someone on the street and they recognize you, that's a vote. If you have a long talk with someone about their sick cat, that's a potential donation. So it is -- the fact is that if you are a big-time political figure, there are no events in your life that cannot be cashed in one way or another. And that, I think, [01:55:00] does very bad things to your head, for one, to use a '60s phrase.

But I've never -- this is a thought that I played around with, I've never fully developed, but there are very few callings, other than perhaps selling insurance, [01:54:00] even that, where there's no private, there's no public, everything can be used if you choose to use it as a way, you know, the conversations with a wealthy person, it's never your friend, it's donor maintenance. So that's the opposite thing, that they're, you know, one of the interesting things, and I had not thought it through, is whether we are -- the way of seeking the presidency is not changing, because suddenly, losing is much more of a financial gain than it used to be. I started to talk about how Lieberman partially lost the Democratic nomination in 2006 before, [01:55:00] because he ran. In the case of Chris Dodd, he clearly had to pull out of his reelection campaign in 2010 because he had been so embarrassed and had moved the family to -- but again, we are living in a world where Chris Dodd is now the head of the Motion Picture Academy of the world and making -- the number is in Mark Liebovich's book [*This Town*], maybe a million and a half a year. You know, the fact is that for so many people who bomb out as Republican candidates for president, the next thing they know, they have their own show, a la Mike Huckabee on Fox News. We have Sarah Palin, financial juggernaut, is certainly greater than Sarah Palin, governing juggernaut. And therefore, there's that whole question of whether [01:56:00] the rules on running have changed, that we maybe, when it comes to running for president, if you can stay out of sex scandals, there's no such thing as bad publicity.

Q: Do you have any concluding reflections on the media and presidential politics?

SHAPIRO: The concluding reflection is 2004 was actually, looking back on it, a high water mark for a couple of things. It was an election in which there was a sincere debate, not over school uniforms, but over something big, the Iraq War, it was an election where because it was an election conducted under McCain-Feingold, despite a few of those 527s that Kerry used, it was pretty much as clean an election in terms of no [01:57:00] outside money, no Sheldon Adelsons, no super PACs, as we are likely to have. It was, on the Democratic side, you had five or six candidates, depending on -- it was Bob Graham got out, Wesley Clark got in late. You had five or six candidates, all of whom, in the backdrop of American public life, were all average or above-average in terms of their competence, in terms of their careers. You know, in terms of all of this, it's not going to be one of those elections that is going to be taught in the history books, you know, like 1896 is an election that changed America. But in a large way, it was an



election in which the system worked. And that while one may not like the outcome of Bush getting rewarded for bungling [01:58:00] in the Iraq War with a second term, this was also an election conducted in an America just three years after the most devastating attack since Pearl Harbor. A very scared America, so that is not a surprising outcome.

It's also an election; it was pretty much an election of inclusion. There was -- because it's Bush who represented the liberal wing of the Republican Party on immigration, there were really very few coded -- there were no coded racial messages, there was no effort to blame -- to say that Latinos should self-deport themselves. So in a large sense, maybe we get nostalgic for the immediate past because everything gets worse after that. It was also, of course, an America of prosperity, [01:59:00] which makes politics a happier going.

But it was also the last campaign where it might be possible to go off the record with candidates, that while you can argue the benefits of going off the record, of not going off the record, I was just talking about this, Kerry, and I'm doing this from memory, again, and some of it's secondhand, John Kerry, after he got the nomination, liked to go to the back of his campaign plane and chat, low-key, with the reporters. As I recall, it was the Associated -- I know it was the Associated Press, and I believe it was the *New York Times* reporter, Jody [inaudible], who said "If the candidate is coming back here, it has to be on the record." Kerry said -- the Kerry people said, "He just wants to chat a little. [02:00:00] It's boring on these flights." And they said, "No, it has to be on the record." So somewhere in early May, to the end of the election, John Kerry never went to the back of the campaign plane again. And I'm sorry, I'm not -- I'm still puzzled to this day on how that was a victory for the free press, or for the public, because even for people operating in the traditional news structure of the twentieth century, as opposed to the much more freewheeling structure of the twenty-first century, even off the record material can lead you to choose which adjectives to use, which things that have happened on the record strike you as important and revealing, and which things that happened on the record don't strike you as important and revealing. I fear, with the culture of Twitter, [02:01:00] with the fact that any photograph could be viral in the next 10 seconds, that what you have are candidates, even at the earliest part of the invisible primary, are more guarded than they ever have been. And the problem is, reporters see this as an adversarial process, therefore there is no sense that anything is taken out of context, because if it's on the record and you have the film, it's there.

I had a moment in 2000. Now this is a point when the entire world was belittling Bush's -- not the entire world, but the Democratic Party was belittling Bush's intelligence. And I remember watching [02:02:00] Al Gore do a nurses event,



probably in August of 2004, in Las Vegas. And it was a morning event, and Gore's on a panel with a group of nurses behind him, and he gets up there, and he says, "And I want to increase funding for," and he turns to the nurses, "I have a mental block, what's that word, when women are tested for breast cancer?" "Mammograms." "Yes, I want to increase funding for mammograms." No one wrote about this. Because the whole narrative of Al Gore was not that he -- that he was too robotic, not that he didn't know words like "mammograms." Had Bush had a similar glitch, it would have been the Democratic Party theme [02:03:00] for the next month, that Bush is so unconcerned about women that he doesn't even know what a mammogram is. And I guess it stayed with me, because to some extent, you could have done that with Gore, but the press didn't, because it didn't fit a larger truth about Gore. That wasn't who Gore was. That he had a mental block for 10 seconds, we all do. But today, that would have been all over Twitter, that would have been all over BuzzFeed, that would have been all over Politico. And I'm just not -- if the goal of all of this, the only justification for having a campaign that takes as long to fight as World War II, as opposed to these 30-day British campaigns. The only justification is to develop a more rounded [02:04:00] understanding of who the candidates are. Because if that isn't the point, then why are we doing it? And if we have now created a world in which any possible glitch is magnified beyond human description by the megaphone effect of modern social media, then we're not learning who they are. Then we're really learning what people who are in a fetal crouch the entire campaign get up and say.

And a couple -- this has been written about, but when John McCain was giving five and six hour press conferences, there were a couple of times when he referred to his North Vietnamese captors as gooks. And the general consensus of the press, I remember being in these conversations, was twofold. Anyone who's been a prisoner of war for five and a half years can call his captors anything they want. [02:05:00] But the second thing is, John McCain has just been on the record for six hours. Let's cut him a little slack; we all make mistakes when we've been talking this long.

And the counter to this is one of the famous Mitt Romney remarks from the 2012 campaign, is when he called himself a "severely conservative" governor of Massachusetts. It was at a CPAC convention. At that point, Romney was facing really tough going in his fight against [Rick] Santorum, and the speech that had been handed out to the press and had been put in the teleprompter called him the conservative governor. "I was the conservative governor." And clearly, seeing that on the teleprompter in real-time, Romney decided that word was not strong enough, and in that split second, he interspersed the word [02:06:00] "severely." And it became just this huge motif of the Romney campaign, it was used a lot in ads by Obama in the Fall. And again, it may not -- these, what happens is, if you don't give the press access,



these small little deviations from the status quo take on a huge life of their own, because that's all you have to go on.

Anyway, I'm ready to go back to 2004, I guess is my message.

Q: Well Walter, thank you for this enormous gift of time and insight and patience. It was a great interview.

SHAPIRO: This has been great fun.

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