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Peter Goldman, Mark Miller, Tom Mathews, Andrew Murr, Thomas M. DeFrank. *Quest for the Presidency, 1992.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994. xv + 742 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-644-0.

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The Presidency as Prize

Since the appearance of Theodore White's *The Making of the President 1960*, journalists have regularly published "insider" accounts of presidential campaigns. Typically the journalist gains access to a candidate's entourage, copiously records the highs and lows along the tortuous campaign trail, and retells the story in painstaking detail soon after the election so that the reading public is quickly provided with exclusive accounts of what really happened behind the scenes. Following the 1984 election, a battery of *Newsweek* editors and senior reporters detailed their campaign experiences in a massive book; they did so again after the 1988 contest. The title under review here is the third such installment in what appears to have become a series of quadrennial publications. Regular readers of the weekly news magazine have already seen excerpts of *Quest for the Presidency, 1992* in a special issue published shortly after the election in November 1992, but they will find much that is new in this book's 735 pages of text.

Quest for the Presidency, 1992 is a good read, fascinating in its descriptions o f late twentieth century presidential politics. Because of the virtually unlimited access afforded NEWSWEEK personnel (especially by the Clinton campaign), t he authors have been able to present vivid portraits of the candidates and their staffs. George Bush appears as detached and inattentive to his reelection ca mpaign, impervious to the widespread voter dissatisfaction with his administrat ion and unwilling to accept the possibility that he could be defeated by any of the challengers. Despite the increasingly frantic warnings of his advisers, the president refused to devote much time to necessary political chores during t he summer and fall of 1992 - so much so that many of his closest aides and confidantes believed that he secretly hoped to be relieved of the burdens of office . By contrast, Bill Clinton ran an aggressive, spirited race made all the more impressive by his ability to defuse potentially lethal accusations concerning extramarital philanderings, Vietnam-era draft dodging, and questionable Whitewater investments. Clinton emerged victorious, the authors argue, because of his handlers' ability to portray him as an agent of change and defender of the embattled middle class. The authors explain H. Ross Perot's quixotic rise to bona fide candidate as the most obvious manifestation of voter disquietude with traditional political practices and institutions. Contrary to the view posited by many reporters and broadcasters during the campaign, the authors view Perot not as an eccentric potential dictator but as a genuine - if somewhat naive - patriot aghast at the breakdown of the political process.

Written in a lively style and extraordinarily thorough in its presentation of campaign benchmarks, the book will undoubtedly appeal to a wide and diverse readership. Yet the question remains about the utility of such a study for academic historians. In the preface Peter Goldman admits that "this is a work of journalism, not of scholarship, or of political theory, or of public policy... It is wholly a work of original reporting" (p. x). He comments that the volume " has none of the appurtenances normally associated with books published by unive rsity presses; there are no footnotes, no source notes, no bibliography," and disclaims any attempts at rendering historical judgments (p. x). Although the authors venture an occasional comparison with past presidential contests and comment on the uniqueness or typicalness of events in 1992, for the most part they limit themselves to straightforward storytelling. Analysis is limited to the internal dynamics of that year's election. Historians, therefore, are most likely to treat the book as a primary source and utilize its wealth of detail as building blocks for constructing a larger interpretive structure. Political historians and political scientists will be interested, of course, in how the outcome of the 1992 presidential election sustains or challenges long- term trends in American political behavior. Did Bill Clinton's victory foreshadow an end to the Republicans' dominance of the electoral col-

lege or was his triumph a Carteresque aberration? Was 1992 a "critical election", portending tectonic shifts in the political landscape? Was the remarkably viable third-party candidacy of H. Ross Perot further evidence of the breakdown of the American two-party system? Was the Democratic party finally recognizing the dissolution of its tattered New Deal coalition and creating a new series of alliances that would reclaim disenchanted voters from the suburbs, the Sunbelt, and the middle class? Because so little time has passed since the election, most historians will choose forbearance and venture no conclusive answers to such questions, surrendering the field for the present to contemporary analysts and prognosticators like Kevin Phillips. In the meantime, the book's signal contribution to a better understanding of presidential politics is in revealing the centrality of money, media, and polling - and, a cynic might add, the marginality of the candidates themselves - to national elections in the 1990s. Indeed, this book deal s less with George Bush, Bill Clinton, and H. Ross Perot than it does with the James Carvilles, Mary Matalins, Ed Rollinses, and Bob Teeters whose energy and ideas truly drove the campaign. (The efforts of the Perotistas constituted something of an exception but, as the authors repeatedly point out, their pristine amateurism ultimately led to a predictable third-place finish.) I suspect that even careful followers of contemporary politics will be astounded by the candidates' slavish, constant reliance upon public opinion poll results and the excruciating attention to form rather than substance in defining the campaign's "message." In the end, *Quest for the Presidency, 1992* spotlights ingenuously how a run for the presidency is mounted in a post-modern America where, as tennis star Andre Agassi reminds us, "image is everything."

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