

The Marlin Fitzwater Center for Communication

Educating leaders of conscience in public communication since 2002



Civility in Presidential Election Discourse

Democracy does not just happen. It requires, at the very least, that its citizens, leaders and media make a profound commitment to informed decision-making at the polls. To this end, the First Amendment guarantees America's proud tradition of robust political discourse, which at its finest and most effective includes, at minimum, respect, tolerance, and rationality.

In short, democracy requires civility. Granted, every American history book includes examples of incivility in government. But to many, it appears that in this election cycle the volume of our nation's discourse has risen to dangerous levels, drowning out the reasoned discussion of issues, policies and approaches our democracy needs to thrive. Exam-

ples are many: candidates shouting each other down on the prime time debate stage or exchanging insults via rapid fire tweets, with media headlines following every keystroke; or the political parties refusing to reach across the aisle, while protestors and supporters hurl slurs at campaign stops.

At the end of such an election cycle, is the voter ready to make an informed decision in the voting booth? What has the first-time voter learned about how to exercise his/her responsibilities in a democracy?

This collection of essays on the concept of civility in presidential election discourse is designed to spark conversations in the classroom, on buses, among family and colleagues. These are conversations that need to happen.

First-time election experience leaves millennials frustrated: “It all sucks”

By Juliana Wilson '08
Graduate Assistant

Millennials, like other American voters, may head begrudgingly to the polls to cast a vote for a Presidential candidate that they don't even support. “It all sucks,” they say, avoiding the question about whether or not they are ready to vote for a president.

But even if they do not want to vote for a President, are the local political issues and the candidates that represent them, enough to get them out on November 8?

“I don't think I learned anything different about democracy during this election,” said Nicole Dale, age 22, a recent Franklin Pierce college graduate who is now getting her master's degree. “I feel like while watching portions of the debates, that the candidates don't even talk about democracy.”

It is true that, for many, the televised debates are more of an opportunity for the television networks to get higher ratings. The debate has turned into a flashy graphics show, with lively and active live audiences, rather than a civil discussion where the moderators defend the facts while the candidates do their best to present informed platforms about issues that matter most to the American people.

Through the 2016 election cycle, Franklin Pierce sophomore Shaye Kiesel '19 said she learned that running for office is a “dirty process” and that the candidates act “childish with all the bashing they do to each other.”

Millennials, especially those attending college, care mostly about the facts; they crave knowledge and substance. They want to be informed. This is why Senator Bernie Sanders was so attractive to

those potential young voters, while Secretary Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, just seem so ingenuous or, to put it bluntly, fake.

“I have learned that politics today is on the more hateful side rather than the academic side,” said Franklin Pierce sophomore Jessica Wolfe '19. “It's not so much how much you know, it's more about how you can bash the other person running.”

One democracy lesson that millennials learned from this election cycle is that voting in the primary is important. Matt Scoville '17, who is a Republican said, “You must vote for who you believe in when you have a chance in the primaries because if you don't the wrong people will overcome the others.”

So, when Sanders dropped out of the race after an impressive primary campaign, many millennials dropped out too. They no longer felt that the accurate information that they were longing for would reach them. Kiesel admits that she thinks the wrong people are running and is still stumped as to how they became the front-runners for their parties. Simply put, they don't believe that either the Republican or Democratic presidential candidate is capable of telling the truth.

But why? Why don't they trust the information that is coming out of the mouths of the candidates? And if they don't believe either candidate is telling the truth, then how can they make an informed decision?

Both of these questions come down to sources. Any college student, and most millennials in general, can tell you that it is important to have multiple sources in order to validate information and facts. But in an age with so much information, literally in their pockets at all times, perhaps there are too many sources out there to dig through.

“I feel like I need to do more research on the information I desire because it seems that the only information I'm getting is how horrible or disgusting the candidates are opposed to their plans for the country and what they want to do when they get into power so it feels like there's not enough being said and it's more you have to research on your own,” said Kiesel.

Friends and family members are always sharing conflicting information on social media platforms, which is followed by long threads of disagreement, finger pointing, and oftentimes name calling. There are far too many opinions that cloud up the facts.

This information overload has left many millennials exhausted and determined to just stay out of the political discourse all together. They do not trust what they've read on the Internet, or, if they do, they will not defend what they believe, because more than likely someone else has claimed that information to be false and they don't want to be wrong or called out.

Wolfe does feel like she has enough information to cast an educated vote on November 8, and she's not intimidated by the amount of information on the Internet. “I know where to look,” she said.

And then, to make matters more confusing for the millennials who are just trying to make an educated vote, there are all the conspiracy theories. Trump was hired by Clinton so that she wins. Sanders lost the primary because of widespread voter fraud, which was Clinton's doing. Clinton's emails were hacked by the Russians because Trump loves Putin.

But isn't this part of democracy? It certainly is discourse, as messy and conflicting as it might be. We all have a voice, but whether we chose to use it or not is what makes the difference.



FranklinPierce
UNIVERSITY



Franklin Pierce University is an accredited university that achieves outstanding student success through the integration of liberal arts and professional programs. Degrees are offered through the doctoral level. This community of educators and learners create an environment that fosters intellectual curiosity and encourages experiential and applied learning. Each student is empowered to discover and fulfill their unique potential, so that they enter the professional world with the confidence and knowledge to be leaders of conscience. Franklin Pierce graduates are well-prepared for the professional, personal, and social demands required for success in the 21st century.

Learn more at franklinpierce.edu

The Why, When, and Where of Civil Discourse

By Kerry McKeever, Ph.D.
Dean, The College at Rindge

After a few years of using any given language, most people slip into what we might call the “habit of knowing,” an assumption that words that pass by us with ever increasing frequency have so much familiarity and fit us so well that we no longer question what we know, or might not know, about them. We forget that words are living things, with flesh, sinew, and bone. Words change as the surge of time and usage flow through them, keeping them alive, helping them to grow in meaning, exalting them to greater significance, or condemning them to obscurity. This is why it is important, every so often, to pause, to pick up words as if they are newly found objects, at once known but also foreign to us, so that we can re-examine them. Such examination enables us to re-member words, to once again recall the nuances of meaning that the rush of life has caused us to leave like so much detritus by the side of the road.

Our sensitivity to the power of words is heightened during our election cycle. If we are paying attention, and everyone should be paying attention and researching statements and facts—since voting is not merely a right but also a responsibility—we begin to parse statements made by candidates, research statements and political validity through neutral political fact-checking, and engage in other means to determine how we will cast our votes. We wonder about words taken out of context, words mis-attributed or mis-quoted, words said in public or private. In short, we obsess about words. Nearly everyone engages in some sort of discourse or another. Political pundits and journalists, spouses of candidates and campaign managers—in fact, anyone who can convince us that they should be heard finds five minutes to extoll ad nauseum the virtues of his or her candidate and the vices of opponents. Regular citizens-- those who do not go running for the foxhole as soon as the election cycle begins and who are not connected with the candidates or with media—have their part as well. In every nook and cranny of the nation where people can gather, we begin to engage in discussion. Things can go pretty well in most elections, but in some hotly contested races, where everyone believes that the stakes are extraordinarily high, well, conversation can get heated, simmer, and, in some cases, boil over. Soon, the structures of commentary and argument, debate and rant are pulled upward into a cone of swirling positions, ideas, and contradictions where emotions run amuck, fomenting false accusations, recriminations, and threats until the territory of conversation becomes a landscape laid waste by the force of our disagreements. As we gaze at the wasteland we have created, we wonder how what

was supposed to be civil discourse got us there. And wonder we should.

If wondering can turn to reflection, and reflection to a self-conscious and consequently deliberative understanding of how language works, then wondering can be a very positive thing. Let us wonder, for example, and to begin with, exactly what we mean by “civil discourse.” This aside from what we think it means, or assume it means: talking nicely to each other about stuff. Civil discourse means far more than that, and far less as well, since it has parameters of place, subject, and intent that separate it from other kinds of “discourse.” Let us first pick up the word “discourse” and treat it like a newly found object. “Discourse” is not merely talking. The Oxford English Dictionary can help us here to restore the flesh and sinew to a word that, for us, has become merely skull and bones. Initially, the meaning of “discourse,” coming from Latin, did allow for the common definition of the word as we commonly think of it, as conversation running off in multiple directions. We can thank the influence of the French on the word’s usage in the Medieval period, which, after some semantic wanderings, came to mean most prominently, “The process or faculty of reasoning; . . . [or] reasoned argument or thought. . .” (OED). As such, “discourse” is not opinion, gossip, or wishful thinking.

“[I]t is important, every so often, to pause, to pick up words as if they are newly found objects, at once known but also foreign to us, so that we can re-examine them.”

It actually requires seriousness and critical thinking. When we consider the word “civil” coupled with “discourse” literally being modified by it, the playing field of “civil discourse” becomes even more defined. “Civil” carries three important characteristics that shape its use and meaning. First, “civil” applies to citizens of the same country or to members of a community. Issues which are “civil” are non-military and non-criminal. Second, “civil” means to be polite. Finally, something that is “civil” is not something that is determined organically or naturally, but is fixed by a regulating structure of a set of laws. In total, this means that “civil discourse” is reasoned conversation that is concerned with the community, politely stated in directed discussion.

Although on the surface looking at civil discourse in this way does not appear to make distinctions that are valuable to us, it really does help to narrow the playing field. Let’s look at an example. First, does a debate constitute a type of civil discourse? As much as we would like it to, it does not really, and here is why. Back we go to the OED, where “debate” is clearly described as an activity that is potentially stressful, an “argument, dispute, controversy, discussion, especially the discussion of questions of public interest . . . in any assembly”(OED). No matter how semantics or time has cut it, the principle of debate does not guarantee polite conversation any more than it does reason or logic, although “formal” debate may well do so. The power in this last statement lies in the power of the modifier “formal.” Note as well that “debate” is “public” rather than “civil,” in the sense of “civil” as pertaining to community. Debates are not about community: they are about winning. We score the rounds as if we were watching a prizefight, awarding points to well-placed barbs delivered as if they were blows. We boo when we think debaters hit “below the belt.” At the end, we declare a winner, basing our judgements on style and delivery more than we do on substance. We bemoan the fact that candidates rarely stick to the issues, avoid answering questions, “pivot” and practice other rhetorical dance moves, and neglect to admit that candidates have limited time to address in any substantive way the complicated issues we wish them to address. Instead, debates are more spectacle, “A specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature . . . forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it” (OED). Debates are the mise en scene of the political world, and, as such, poor substitutes for civil discourse. Applying the same rubric would rule out most “public” and “private” forms of discussion as well. All political forums will fail one element or the other. Conversations between political strategists working for campaigns constitute collaboration, team work, strategizing, bantering about platforms, methods, messages, and results. Media outlets will concentrate on the most newsworthy items, getting scoops, and drawing attention to their media outlets. Everyone and every group has a certain self-interest or agenda that it is promoting.

As jaded as that last statement may sound, it does not rule out the possibility of civil discourse, but such conversations will not generate from the people or discursive arenas we expect. So the best course is to stop looking for civil discourse in the places where it will inevitably fail, through the force of myriad agendas and perspectives, to appear. Not at all. If we are to have legitimate civil discourse within the election cycle, this discourse will spring

Continued on page 4

from one place and one place only. There is only one way to guarantee that issues will be discussed with reason. There is only one way to guarantee that we are polite in the process of discussing very tough, complicated issues. There is only one way to guarantee that the focus will be on the good of the community, the community of citizens of these United States and our territories. And that way is for each and every citizen to create the possibility of civil discourse by discoursing civilly. Voting is more than a right: it is a responsibility to research, to reason, to act on behalf of community, eschewing the power of self-interest as the only motivator for our votes. So civil discourse: Why? Because community, as Dickens notes in *A Tale of Two Cities*, means “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.” When? Always. And, where? Within each citizen and within each voter. This is the real “why, when, and where” of civil discourse.

Sources for further study:

“A Civil Discourse: Returning Civility To Politics” Civil Discourse Blog. *Huffington Post*, September 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paola-k-amaras/a-civil-discourse-returning-b_10170952.html

“Five Tips for Engaging Students in Civil Discourse.” *ExploBlog*. <http://blog.explo.org/education/five-tips-for-engaging-students-in-civil-discourse>

To keep up with issues in discussion in line with civil discourse, go to The National Institute on Civil Discourse: <http://ivn.us/2014/04/07/national-institute-civil-discourse-brings-opposing-ideas-together/>

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. Using the model above, discuss and define the word “community.” What constitutes a community?
2. What types of strategies or initiatives can you think of that might promote civil discourse-based discussions in a community?
3. Find out what “deliberative dialogue” is. What place does deliberative dialogue have in civil discourse? How do you distinguish between deliberative dialogue and civil discourse?

Civil Discourse in the Age of Trump

By James E. (Jed) Donelan, Ph.D.

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; Associate Professor of Philosophy and Humanities; Interim Director, New England Center for Civic Life

What is democracy all about, and why do we think it is such a good form of government? Reputed quips from Winston Churchill aside, one answer to this question is that democracy is a way of realizing a moral insight, namely that human beings are capable of being self-legislating, autonomous, and free.

Those of us who think that this is the fundamental reason why democracy is a better form of government than others do so because we believe that democracy allows citizens to come together to mutually address issues of shared concern. To do so requires civil discourse; that is conversations where real disagreements are aired, reasons adjudicated, and common ground sought, such that a people can decide their own answers to their most pressing problems.

And yet look at what we have. We are in a presidential election cycle that many believe to be the most uncivil in memory. We have a state governor leaving an obscenity-laced voicemail on the home phone of a state representative. Facebook “friends” who are willing to make and apparently believe the most outlandish claims and ignore, ridicule, or attack the most reasoned arguments. An anonymous twitterverse where the ugliest threats can be made with impunity. Is this what democracy is? If it is, what’s so good about it?

This being the state of our political discourse, is it any wonder we can’t get anything done? While we face a crisis in Syria, threats to our security, deteriorating trust between neighborhoods and police, global climate change, Zika, and whatever else you want to name, we can’t even acknowledge the fact that those who disagree with us might have something to offer to the conversation.

When we use broad categories like “Muslims,” “Mexicans,” or “deplorables,” we exclude from the conversation precisely those who are essential contributors to the problem’s solution, whatever it may be. Some people probably are deplorable – die-hard racists and xenophobes who cannot or will not adapt to the realities of the 21st century. But most people simply want security, economic stability, the ability to pursue their interests and to raise their children, and these things seem less certain in a rapidly changing and ever more complicated world.

Now more than ever we need cool heads to prevail, and for hot heads to be cooled down. Yet now more than ever cool heads seem few and far between.

Civil discourse is not an end in itself. It is not a call to politeness and avoidance of conflict so that

our children won’t see us being mean to each other. Civil discourse is a means to democratic decision-making. It is not a call for feigned togetherness in the face of deep-seated division. It is a call for disagreement, but for disagreement that seeks to understand the other side, not to demonize it; to reach out to the other side, not to wall it off; to learn from the other side, not to hound it into submission. It is a call to what is often thought to be what is best about America, its pragmatic, “can do” attitude.

Where did this attitude go? It is time to roll up our sleeves again, constructively talk to each other, and see what real progress we can make on the serious issues at hand.

“If we really want to take the idea that we are capable of being self-legislating, autonomous, and free seriously, then maybe the time is long overdue for a deep look inside.”

So where does the responsibility for our current state of political ineptitude lie. With political leaders who are more interested in maintaining their positions than solving our problems? Certainly. With the media who prioritize

sensationalism over investigation? Sure. But what about with us? Isn’t the whole point behind a democracy that the people rule? If this is the case, then aren’t the people responsible for the quality of their government? “But,” some will say, “our democracy has been stolen from us by political elites, mainstream media, and globalization.” Okay. But why do we allow ourselves to elect politicians more interested in power than policy, to be manipulated by the media more interested in profit than truth?

I remember a few months ago watching a talking head show when a commentator ridiculed the idea that the voters have some responsibility for their elected officials. “It’s never a good idea to blame the voters.” This might be true if you are trying to win an election, but perhaps less true if you are trying to fix your democracy. If we really want to take the idea that we are capable of being self-legislating, autonomous, and free seriously, then maybe the time is long overdue for a deep look inside.

Sources for further study:

Mathews, David. *The Ecology of Democracy*. Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation Press, 2014.

Richardson, Henry. *Democratic Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. Why is democracy a good form of government?
2. Why is civil discourse necessary to a healthy democracy?
3. What responsibilities do citizens have for the health of their democracy?

On the importance of protest...

By Christina Cliff, Ph.D.

Visiting Assistant Professor, Political Science

In the 2016 presidential election, much has been made of the apparent loss of civility in the discourse of the candidates, their supporters, and the general masses. Some parents are even concerned about the potential impact of the language and behavior of the candidates on their children. Incivility in our democratic discourse is not a new phenomenon, however, and has existed since the beginning of the country.¹ The last few years have seen a noticeable increase in incivility. Scholars generally agree that since the 1980s there has been an increase in attack ads, mudslinging, and attempts to insult and discredit not just political opponents, but the supporters of those candidates.² But it is not just the candidates and their associates that have roles to play in this election, and it is not just the campaigns that have been accused of incivility.

Arguably, the most important actors in any political election are not the candidates, but the people that will be represented by the candidates. Beyond voting, political participation in elections comes through citizens demanding that the candidates discuss the important issues of the day. The constitutional protections for free speech, free association, and the right to petition the government regarding grievances are cornerstones of American democracy. These protected civil rights provide individuals the opportunity to rally with others for change through protests. Political protests are critical to American history; the Boston Tea Party was a spark to the push for independence. Since independence, every major political and social change in the United States has been preceded by protests including giving women the right to vote, ending legalized racial segregation, ending US involvement in the Vietnam War, and passing laws protecting LGBT rights.

Presidential elections are unique in the American political system because it is the one time, every four years, that the entire American population is focused at the same time on pursuing their political agendas. Into this competition steps the various social movements, the demands for change, the hope that individual interests can be supported, protected, or advanced. For every cause, belief, and issue there are individuals and groups pushing for their side, to draw national attention for their movements. But during the presidential elections, it may not just be the candidates and their campaigns that suffer from incivility, but also the public, often in the form of political protestors.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," the role of protests is to force discussions with a society that refuses to consider political changes. As King put it, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish

such creative tension that community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue."³ One could argue that the best way to evoke King's "creative tension" is through a dash of incivility.

Political protests are, at their nature, what Tocqueville called "...a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority."⁴ In order to force the majority to consider the interests of the minority, the minority may need to tap into emotions rather than logic, confront rather than compromise. Vietnam War protesters chanted, "Hey, Hey, LBJ, How many babies did you kill today?" to force politicians and the public to recognize the emotional core at the heart of their objections to the war. What the protesters were demanding was a discussion of the morality and ethics of war, and doing so in a way that directly attacked President Lyndon Johnson. American politics allows for incivility by protecting the individual's right to discuss, debate, and defend their personal norms and beliefs. In some ways American politics also encourages incivility, because as Bennet points out, "Incivility is a winning strategy for an underdog determined to defend fundamental principles and win the political game at any cost... [which] seems to work best when opponents prefer more civilized discourse."⁵ There are times and places where incivility may be the last tool available to groups and individuals that cannot engage the interest of the government.

The danger of incivility, however, is that political discussions devolve into shouting matches where neither side hears the other, and observers remain uninformed bystanders. Spectacles created by incivility also contribute to the distaste and distrust that Americans have for politics and politicians. Protesters that rely on incivility may alienate those members of the majority that potentially could have been convinced to join or accept the wishes of the minority. And when incivility by some within a protest overshadows the civil themes of the movement, the likelihood of counter-protests grows. In the past election cycle violence by a few people at Black Lives Matter events has created skepticism about the movement's message and intentions and prompted counter-protests such as Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter.

The Institute for Civility in Government argues that civility in politics and protests is about "...disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same."⁶ In protests and in politics, while incivility may prompt a response, civility is arguably the best approach to effective and fundamental change. As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed

it is the only thing that ever has." Protesting and demands for change are a critical part of American democracy, but the necessity of civility in those movements is up for debate.

¹Herbst, Susan (2010). *Rude democracy: Civility and incivility in American politics*. Temple University Press.

²Dailey, W. O. (2015). "Civility in Political Discourse." *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication*. 1-11.

³King Jr, Martin Luther (1963). Letter from Birmingham city jail, p.115.

⁴de Tocqueville, A., Goldhammer, A. (trans), (2004). *Democracy in America*. Library of America, p.218.

⁵Bennett, W. L. (March 2011)."What's wrong with incivility? Civility as the new censorship in American politics." John Breaux Symposium, "In the Name of Democracy: Leadership, Civility, and Governing in a Polarized Media Environment." Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University, p.3.

⁶The Institute for Civility in Government (2016). "What is Civility?" <http://www.instituteforcivility.org/who-we-are/what-is-civility/>.

Sources for further study:

The Institute for Civility in Government: <http://www.instituteforcivility.org/>

The University of Arizona's National Institute for Civil Discourse: <http://nicd.arizona.edu/>

The Kettering Foundation: "What does it take to make democracy work like it should?" <https://www.kettering.org/core-insights/core-insights>

Museum of the Moving Image, "The Living Room Candidate-Presidential Campaign Commercials, 1952-2016," <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>

The Building Movement Project "Equipping nonprofits to advance social change" <http://www.buildingmovement.org/>

Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance Project: <http://www.tolerance.org/>

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. Negative ads have been prevalent in the 2016 election cycle, not just on TV but also online and through a variety of social media platforms. How many negative ads do you think you have seen and what do you think, what have you learned after viewing the ads? Do negative ads work?

2. The Constitution guarantees the people have the right to assemble, petition the government regarding their grievances, and the right of free speech with few limitations. Should there be limits on these freedoms? For instance, should there be limits on the types of things that protesters can say/do? Examples: should protesters be allowed to burn the American flag, wave the Confederate flag, shout obscenities at police officers, block roads?

3. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for direct action such as protests and marches to create a "crisis," that will force a community to negotiate. Do you think that incivility is an effective way to create a "crisis" to force negotiations?

4. Former presidential candidate Barry Goldwater when accepting the Republican nomination for president, said in his 1964 speech: "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." How does this apply to the discussion of civility/incivility in politics and protests? Do you think Goldwater and King were arguing for the same things?

5. Some protest movements advocate violence, exclusionary policies, or change that will negatively impact specific groups of people, for example the Ku Klux Klan. How could you argue that the existence of these negative (anti) groups are actually beneficial for democracy?

Marlin Fitzwater: “I do not t

Former White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, who served President Ronald Reagan and President George H.W. Bush, sat down on the campus of Franklin Pierce University for an interview on August 9, 2016, with Trent Spiner, executive editor of the *New Hampshire Union Leader*. Excerpts of their conversation are included here.

Trent Spiner: What do you think about the state of our political discourse right now?

Marlin Fitzwater: It has changed a lot since I was an active political player.... The political theme today is so much faster, so much sharper, so much more difficult. I think, for a lot of reasons, that I can hardly equate the two. I remember when we started the campaign of 1992 with former President Bush and he said to me, “I don’t want to hear you ever say a critical word about Hillary Clinton or Bill Clinton.” Nothing about Hillary, and this is after we had gotten through Monica and other problems.

Doesn’t that sound a little quaint today? Now everybody calls each other names like crazy and it gets pretty ugly. I think I was probably there at the right time.

Spiner: Even people in their own parties?

Fitzwater: Which is crazy to me. Ronald Reagan always had the rule of “say no evil.” You just never did it.

Spiner: The idea of the political center. Here in New Hampshire, where we have the first-in-the-nation primary, you had a democratic socialist defeat Hillary Clinton by 22 points. You had Donald Trump win by more than 100,000 votes when there is still something like a dozen candidates in the field. Do you think that is a sign of how divided this country is or do you see something is happening here?

Fitzwater: I think it is a sign of the division and parties in the country generally. It is also a sign of the technology and communications that we have so many messages coming from so many sources that it generates support and opposition to all the candidates. You have the 17 candidates--that is a contributive factor. But, the question is, how do you deal with this? I think that is really a quandary for all of the candidates and it shows in this campaign. The Republican side started out with 17 candidates on the stage and I must say that I picked the president from that group, and he was the first one thrown out, so, it is pretty hard to tell exactly how fast-paced it is going.

Spiner: What do you think that does? What does that do to our politics?

Fitzwater: First of all, it puts a greater onus on concentration and, really, considering all the angles. That is, that reflects on what you read and how you get your information through television, newspapers, and all the social media. And you have to really do a serious analysis of candidates. The candidates now are personality-oriented, making it even more difficult to really make judgments.

Spiner: [Y]ou brought up the point of the rules between the press and the people that they cover, and it certainly seems like the rules have changed. We have seen even in this election, the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton has not really held many press conferences. On the Republican side, Donald Trump has vilified the press at some of his events and it really seems like that level used to be a cordial relationship while you were press secretary and that has changed. Do you think that is true and do you think that is good or bad?

Fitzwater: I think that the relationship has changed between the press and the press secretary. On a gradual basis, over a period of time, it tracks the growth of social media, the internet, the satellites and all of the changes ... in communications.

I would just say that the biggest single factor, I think, was when President Clinton was impeached. His presidency was threatened and he was threatened personally. He told his press secretary, and told others privately, that all bets are off with the press. The old rules that Helen Thomas made up about not putting out stories in the middle of night, not putting out stories late on Friday

night, when the press couldn’t handle them or not playing for weekend audiences, that all went out the window.

But since then, the rules have been basically ignored by everybody. George W. Bush came in with not as much respect for the press as he might have because he was resentful of the way his father was treated, with the way he perceived he was treated. It just got worse from there. Today, the press corps has really got to fight for their lives to get through a day and to get the information they want.

Spiner: You brought up social media. What do you think about the growth of social media and what do you think it does to our politics?

Fitzwater: First of all, let me say a word in defense of Hillary.... [I]n previous campaigns going back to Reagan and Bush when I was there, the rule was always do not hold a press conference once you start the official campaign, which is basically September through November. The reason is simple, when you have a press conference, the agenda goes to the press. They get to ask the questions in what they decide is important, which is what you have to



Franklin Pierce University student Tom Dynan interviews Marlin Fitzwater on “The Presidency and The Pres

think there is any quick fix”

talk about. But candidates have a message and have a position they want to present to the American people. So, it is much easier and more efficient to do it by other means such as speeches, television ads, and so forth. That is why they do not hold press conferences. It is not because they do not like the press or do not trust the press, but they do not want to give them the right to set the agenda.

So anyway, to get to the technology side of it, it is so fast today that we have talked about how to feed the cable news services because they are 24-hour operations. Fox News, CNN News, BBC, and those kinds of places.

But they were nothing, really, compared to the demand

“I remember when we started the campaign of 1992 with former President Bush and he said to me, ‘I don’t want to hear you ever say a critical word about Hillary Clinton or Bill Clinton’.... Doesn’t that sound a little quaint today?”

from the bloggers, which makes journalists out of 300 million people. They are always after information, they create stories, blogger stories, to feed to the regular news and so forth.

The internet, for example, now makes it possible to get pictures from every place in the world all the time with no correspondents around, no one to tell you what is going on. But those pictures are there and therefore we see war, conflict, we see governments fall and rise. Often a corre-

spondent is 1,000 miles away in London or some other place.

So, there is just no limit to the pressure on the White House to answer questions. I think that, really, is a major problem. Now we have the development of social media – Twitter, Youtube, Facebook and those things which are a clear advancement. Low and behold, Donald Trump shows up, who is an inveterate Twitter person, and the whole country is seeing a whole new level of Twitter use. Almost every day Twitter is used to establish the issue they are dealing with, the timetable, the agenda.... [I]t has clearly has changed the way candidates campaign.

Spiner: There have been polls that have showed recently that American trust in the media is at the lowest point it has ever been. Which, I think, as the editor of a newspaper, is a dangerous thing. [In your book *Call the Briefing*, you] say that the press are good people and they have jobs to do. What do you think about that stat, that the American public does not trust the media anymore?

Fitzwater: I tend to think it goes back to the issue you started this discussion with on divisiveness in the country. The political opposition, the two parties and so forth. The divisiveness is so tough that basically on any issue you raise, you have half the country for it and half the country against it. The problem is if you are in half of the country that is against the issue or against the prevalent position, you think everything you read is wrong, so immediately people are saying the press do not know what they are talking about, these are all lies, these are all wrong, because you do not agree with it.

On the other hand, the other half thinks you are pretty honest. What they read is consistent with their point of view. It goes back and forth. The end result is the press is always on the end of getting beat up by at least half the country at any given time.

The divisiveness is dangerous in that sense in what it does to the media and how people perceive the media. If you watch Fox all the time, for example, you do not believe anything you hear on CNN because you know that has the liberal point of view and Fox has the conservative point of view.

One of the problems is Fox has been so successful, made a lot of money and they are the highest in ratings. Now the print media is doing the same thing because that is

the road to getting the money, and you have to follow that.

So it has caused people to have to think differently about what they are hearing, about their sources of information. Some do a better job of that than others. But I am pretty forgiving of the press, themselves, although they have become advocates on both sides just like everybody else. It is intellectually a tougher game for everybody involved.

I do not really know how you do that; I think it has to be worked out. The media, for good reasons, I think, rather than bad, is kind of a self-correcting profession. If you look at the media growth historically and the change in the last 200 years, if you want to go back that far, you see kind of a 50-year change in the way they operate over that period of time. We are going through a really tumultuous period in time.

Spiner: You have the media, less trusted than ever before, and you have two candidates more disliked than any other candidate running for president in the past. What do you think we do to fix it, or does it not need to be fixed?

Fitzwater: I do not think there is any quick fix. I do not think there is any magic button you can push. First of all, you need to get candidates who understand there is a problem there, and then ... [the media need to try] to be responsible and more straightforward in the information they put out. From that point of view, I think the press is trying to fix it.

Spiner: What is the most surprising change you have seen since you left the White House in terms of the media? What is the biggest thing that shocked you?

Fitzwater: That is really tough, but it is the speed. How fast things happen. We have a great story here, maybe you have already heard it, that we had students at the two conventions. They were at the Republican convention and they were sitting by a woman who stood up to protest. I was watching the election on television and I thought, here is trouble. You could see the guards coming in to get her. But what I did not know and found out later was that two Franklin Pierce students were sitting right in front of her and they immediately stood up, took their cell phones and shot pictures. That presence of mind, I am so proud of it.

Journalism today is changing; it is getting faster. Students understand if news breaks out three feet away from you, go for it.



Photo | Staff

... bus during the Fitzwater Center's summer student media program.

Good manners do not necessarily make for substantive debate

By Allan Rachlin, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Sociology

We need be cautious when calling for civility in politics that we not mistake good manners for substantive democratic discourse and debate.

If we understand democracy to require informed, thoughtful discussion and debate of issues central to social justice and the quality of life of the nation's people, certainly, name calling, snarky posts and personal attacks do not contribute to the promotion of democracy. Such discourse can, indeed, serve to undermine democracy, displacing substance with spectacle, distracting citizens from their responsibility of informed participation. The absence of such crude, coarse discourse though is not sufficient to necessarily encourage engaged, thoughtful democratic participation.

In a society that values order and scorns tension – think of the maxim against discussing politics, as well as religion and sex, at social gatherings – civility is likely to be conflated with absence of challenge and debate. Well-mannered behavior though is not likely to challenge the status quo, existing assumptions and power relationships. When we understand civility as mannered behavior, we are likely to discourage exactly the kinds of discussions that are most necessary in a democracy.

Rather than wringing our hands over the lack of civility in Presidential Election Discourse, we might instead direct our concern toward the lack of substance throughout American political discourse, including presidential and other election campaign cycles.

It has long been decried that election coverage is presented as a horse-race. The most recent poll dominates the news cycle. Much like an athletic contest, who has the lead, what strategies might bring victory and how costly errors might be avoided, frame much election coverage. As 'news' becomes increasingly understood as the voyeuristic tracking of celebrities' lives – their foibles, missteps, tweets and managed public presentations – so too now, candidate as celebrity has been added to the 'campaign as horse-race' frame. Neither horse-race, nor celebrity spectacle contribute to a thoughtful political discourse required of informed participation in a democracy. Civility, as polite, mannered interaction won't remedy horse-race or celebrity spectacle.

As we commonly do in American culture, we imagine that if attitudes are improved, a social problem will be remedied. Racial and ethnic inequality will be resolved if we would all just see each other as people. Environmental degradation would cease if we would become more respectful of mother earth, and if we were just willing to talk to each other, there would be less violence in our world. We fail to recognize how institutional structures, and the power interests embedded into those structures, contribute to the social problems.

As long as we uncritically get news and an understanding of our world primarily through

commercial media, that world will be experienced through spectacle. The purpose of commercial media is to generate profit for its share holders and owners. A primary source of profit is advertising. The charge for advertising depends on the size and demographics of the audience. If our eyeballs are drawn to contest and spectacle, that is what media

“Demands for sustained, focused, detailed discussions/debates of socially significant issues, grounded in fact-based analysis won't eliminate debased discourse; it might, though, leave less room for manufactured scandals, distracting personal attacks and arguments ad hominem.”

will provide. The more we are fed contest and spectacle, the more likely we are to demand it. The reinforcing cycle continues.

Asking our candidates to be more respectful of each other – and us, the citizens – will do little to improve political discourse. It will neither make discourse more polite, nor elevate it to the needs of democracy. Candidates require media exposure for successful campaigns. Commercial media require audience for financial success. We, the citizen audience, are drawn to the political entertainment we are accustomed to. The cycle continues as our political process and the foundation of our commercial media institutions have a symbiotic relationship.

It is these institutional inter-relationships that must be addressed if our political discourse is to be elevated and promote democratic process and experience. The current election cycle has certainly intensified the decline of discourse, but what we are experiencing is an intensification of long existing processes, not a sudden change of kind.

Rather than asking candidates and their minions for well-mannered, civil, polite election discourse, it is our civic responsibility to demand discourse that enables informed understanding of issues and policies that shape our shared societal experience and promotes spirited discussion of those issues and policies. That demand must address organizational and institutional practices.

There is no single magical change that will 'fix' the current situation. We might imagine the re-introduction of licensing regulations that carve-out a portion of the broadcast schedule for civically responsible programming. The debate over such regulation, and even what constitutes

civic responsibility, would itself be a contribution to substantive, democratic discussion. Networks broadcasting debates might introduce a 'kill-button' that immediately cuts off a candidate's microphone when s/he exceeds his/her time limit responding to a moderator's question. Candidates may then respond more directly to the posed question rather than providing a rehearsed assaults on opponents. Those same networks might introduce Jon Stewart-like video clips during debates to hold candidates accountable when they morph their positions, appealing to different audiences, as campaigns progress from primaries to general elections. Journalists might insist on permission for follow-up questions in candidate interviews ...

These may be no more than minimalist, simplistic suggestions. Much more significant changes are required, but unless we begin to engage in such discussions about how we can bring substance to our political discourse – rather than concentrating on the politeness and manners of the candidates' rhetoric – we will fail the needs of healthy democracy.

Demands for sustained, focused, detailed discussions/debates of socially significant issues, grounded in fact-based analysis won't eliminate debased discourse, it might, though, leave less room for manufactured scandals, distracting personal attacks and arguments ad hominem. Let's focus our concern on how to achieve discussions of substance necessary to realize the requirements of democracy, rather than (offensive) style.

Sources for further study:

Dean, Jodi. *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2009

Kotler, Philip. *Democracy in Decline: Rebuilding its Future*. Los Angeles: Sage. 2016

Meiklejohn, Alexander. *Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government*. New York: Harper Brothers Publishers 1948

Rodin, Judith and Stephen P. Steinberg. *Public Discourse in America: Conversation and Community in the Twenty-first Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2003

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. Role-play, or simply script, a conversation where rules of etiquette are adhered to, but there is no communication of substance.
2. Identify two or three issues that you understand to be most important to the welfare and future of the nation. What information do you need to be able to make informed judgements about policies related to these issues? How do you know that is the information that you need? Has the current campaign helped you acquire that information? What have been occasions where you have had access to the needed information?
3. If you were to determine the rules of a televised Presidential debate, what would those rules be? Why would you establish these specific rules? Why might the candidates, or the networks broadcasting the debate challenge your rules?

Deliberation reminds citizens they are stakeholders in a Democracy

By Zan Walker-Goncalves
Associate Professor, Composition and Rhetoric

Why is trash talking and storytelling so compelling to voters particularly when candidates are larger-than-life “stars?” When politicians project the message “I know what I’m doing” and use charged language these public figures are using classical rhetorical appeals based on a candidate’s evident trustworthiness and playing on voter emotions. It’s hard in such a swirl of powerful persuasive strategies to focus on finding the rational appeals, the platforms these candidates represent, and engage in the hard work of sorting out how these policies affect real people. If citizens are unable to deliberate with one another about these policies--the rational as well as character and emotional appeals--then voting is about participating in a personality contest not a democratic process.

As teachers, how exactly do we guide our students to enter this democratic process? Deliberative dialogue or discourse ethics offers a structure to help not just students but all citizens to examine these appeals in light of their own circumstances and help one another decide how to vote.

What are the differences between debate, discussion, and deliberation? What does the situation for each look like? Who is the audience? What is the purpose of each?

In deliberative dialogue what is “right” or “true” is situated, not absolute; everyone is invited to explore their own situation and offer ideas based on fact, as well as individual personal experience, values, feelings, and beliefs. Ground rules create a deliberative space where “good will” and “pragmatism” are maintained by neutral moderators (Walker-Goncalves). Democracy is based in “we the people” and both current and future voters, students, benefit from sorting out issues with each other. The benefits of using this voice-centered approach directly impact concepts and skills needed for participating in the democratic process. In a 2014 study (Walker-Goncalves) pre- and post-course survey, second semester college students showed remarkable gains in two of these skills as a result of participating in deliberative dialogue forums in the classroom.

- I feel comfortable engaging in dialogues with people who have perspectives that are different from my own.
 - o Pre: Strongly Agree 22.22%
 - o Post: Strongly Agree 43.75%
- I am confident that I can organize complex information in a way that makes sense to others.
 - o Pre: Strongly Agree 16.7%
 - o Post: Strongly Agree 37.5%

These gains are directly related to the structure which

- Guides students to consider issues, both facts and expert opinions;
- Invites students to voice their values and experiences as stakeholders in the issues;

- Supports students to acknowledge tensions and shared values;
- Asks students to find common ground;
- Encourages students to make decisions and urge students to take action.

In addition, every trained moderator applies the following guidelines:

- The purpose of deliberation is to work toward a decision.
- Listen and respect other voices; listening is as important as speaking.
- Participate; no one or two individuals will dominate.
- Consider each approach fairly and weigh the benefits and drawbacks of possible actions.

How Deliberative Dialogue Forums Work

Deliberation reminds citizens they are stakeholders in a democracy where it is essential to examine choices carefully and move the “big story” aside to deliberate with one another and focus on allowing each person to acknowledge his or her story. Deliberative dialogue forums last one and one half to two hours and begin with a “Personal Stake” where participants answer the question of how the issue at hand affects them and the people they know. These “Personal Stake” stories are used

“At the core of our democracy may be less the right to vote than the opportunity to deliberate.”

Robert J. Kingston

Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics

as touchstones as participants examine each possible approach to addressing the issues, humanizing the tensions that necessarily arise between participants as well as enabling people to identify shared values with one another. It is from these shared values that participants are able to find common ground and from there make decisions about which strategies might best address the issue. In the closing or “Reflections” participants are guided to identify any new insights they have gained from listening to others and how those insights inform what they now see as their common ground as a group; it is from this common ground that decisions are made by the group to take action individually and collectively.

The National Issues Forum Educator’s Center is a good place to begin learning how teachers can guide students to deliberate on the issues that compose the platforms of candidates or deliberate on how candidates should communicate with one another and the public.

For example, teachers could begin by first

collecting “Personal Stake” stories using deliberative questions.

Deliberative Questions for the Classroom

- “What concerns you and your friends and family about the way candidates are communicating with each other and voters?”
- “What are the roots of our concerns? That personalities are becoming more important than policies? That candidates and the media put drama and ratings ahead of ethical considerations? That voters are focused on partisan politics rather than the policies that affect real people?”
- “How do we want candidates to address the issues, one another, and voters?”

Teachers can also learn how to host deliberative dialogue forums for students or connect with Common Ground for Action (CGA), an online platform with trained moderators where students can sign up and join an online deliberate dialogue forum. For example, depicted here in this final screen shot at the end of an online deliberative dialogue forum, is how the CGA platform illustrates the range of possible strategies participants support, the x axis, regarding three different approaches to the question “How should we spread prosperity and improve opportunity?” The graphic also represents the varying degrees of agreement, the y axis, between participants regarding these approaches and strategies. At the center is “Common Ground” where agreement and support for strategies and approaches converge among the participants; the common ground from which participants can make decisions and take action. The graphic uses participants’ anonymous answers to how much they support strategies as the group deliberates; the graphic components move along the x and y axes as participants work through and shift their choices in relation to what they are learning from one another about the strategies and approaches.

Sources for further study:

Common Ground for Action. National Issues Forums Institute, 2014. <https://www.nifi.org/en/common-ground-action>

Kingston, Robert J. *Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2012. <https://www.kettering.org/catalog/product/voice-and-judgment-practice-public-politics>

London, Scott. *Political Fix: How Do We Get American Politics Back On Track?* Dayton OH: National Issues Forums Institute, 2013. <https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guide/political-fix>

Matthews, David. *A Public Voice That’s Missing Report*. Dayton OH: Kettering Foundation, 2016. <https://www.nifi.org/en/read-2016-report-public-voice-thats-missing>

National Issues Forum Educator’s Center. National Issues Forums Institute, 2016. <https://www.nifi.org/en/educators-center>

Walker-Goncalves, Zan. “Deliberate Transfers: A Dialogue in the First-Year Composition Classroom on Food and Sustainability” (presentation at the Annual Conference on the Teaching of Writing, University of Connecticut, Storrs, NH, March 2016).

We The Voters Project: In Our Highly Polarized Election Year Can We Listen to Opposing Views? Dir. Chelsey Killebrew. Vulcan Productions, 2016. <https://wethevoters.com/>

The media's role in selecting the President

By Phyllis D. Zrzavy, Ph.D.
Professor, Communication

Presidential elections are an American tradition that now spans over four centuries. In this 58th presidential election cycle, the United States has the distinction of preparing the peaceful transfer of power to the 45th holder of the highest office of the land.

Every election cycle brings with it promises of civility, of staying on the moral high-ground, of making the campaign about the issues and not resorting to personal attacks. And yet, each presidential election cycle ends up in uncivil exchanges, and losing candidates typically decry the election outcomes as the result of unfair media tactics.

In 1960, it was the unprecedented use of television to broadcast the presidential debates that was considered an extraordinary influence on the elections. Historians of the 1968 presidential elections considered the clever use of media packaging and marketing as the unparalleled “selling” of the President.

The 1980 presidential election was won by the candidate with proven telegenic appeal who had honed his ability to stay on message as a broadcaster and actor. Each four-year election cycle since then has brought new scripts for modern presidential politicking, each tapping into new media technologies and ever more sophisticated uses of communication techniques.

In the run-up to the 2008 elections, the massive reallocation of resources from mass media to targeted Web 2.0 technologies, such as YouTube and Facebook, helped make it a watershed event in presidential campaign history. The 2012 elections saw the introduction of “ad watches” and fact checkers who critiqued political campaign ads for their varying levels of truthfulness.

What will be standout attributes of the 2016 presidential elections, from a media literacy point of view? While it is too soon to arrive at a conclusive assessment, three developments emerge as lasting hallmarks of the current election cycle:

1. The continued decline in the effectiveness and relevance of the candidate-sponsored political advertisement.

Televised political advertisements were once considered major game changers in political campaigns. Lyndon Johnson's 1964 “Daisy” ad, Ronald Reagan's 1984 “Morning in America” ad, and the 1988 “Willie Horton” ad — the first major presidential advertisement sponsored by a political action committee (PAC) — all were credited with having a decisive, and in some cases unfair, influence on election outcomes.

The political ads of the current campaign season look like they were produced using the same well-

worn formulas, regardless of the portrayed political viewpoint. According to analysts, they largely look and sound the same and, as a result, have lost the ability to persuade in their political message. While billions of campaign dollars are still being invested in the production and broadcasting of political advertisements, observers agree that their influence on the electorate has fundamentally waned. The 2016 campaign may well mark the final tipping point in the further decline of importance of political ads in presidential races.

2. The manifest contradiction between engineered pursuits of free media attention and the condemnation of mainstream media coverage as biased.

In the last half century, presidential campaigns have developed ever more sophisticated communication protocols to ensure free media reporting.

Candidate appearances are staged strategically to coincide with a campaign's chosen message of the day: a visit to a hospital to emphasize health care; an event at a solar panel plant to stress the importance of renewable energy efforts; a campaign stop at a defense contractor to stress the importance of America's enduring military strength in the world. All presidential campaigns thus have attempted to

influence the agenda of reporting and commentary, especially of the important weekend news cycle.

The 2016 campaign went several steps further, however. During the primaries, the press corps followed a presidential candidate to several personally-owned businesses, including to Scotland for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at a golf resort. Ironically, the same campaigns also complained that press reports unfairly favored their opponents.

Completely unprecedented in 2016 has also been the sustained condemnation of all mainstream media as untrustworthy, biased, and corrupt. At one point in the primary campaign, the press credentials of The Washington Post were revoked by a candidate, a measure without parallel in the history of presidential elections.

3. The sustained trend towards diversification of communication channels and the use of social media in presidential campaigns.

The 2016 presidential elections have witnessed an extraordinary rise in social media use for the purpose of fundraising. Candidates have turned to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to engage their supporters very early in the election cycle. All presidential hopefuls — 17 Republicans, 6 Democrats, and a number of third-party candidates — have had a presence on an array of digital platforms, with hashtags and custom content created to solicit support from identified segments of the electorate.

New in the 2016 was the use of social media for the purpose of real-time electioneering that allowed candidates to bypass the conventional mass media. Tweets in particular have become the new coin of political press coverage. Diminished in their fourth-estate role as the arbiters of what is actually newsworthy, the media are increasingly obliged to report on what has been tweeted rather than on what has been independently discerned as issues of significance to the voter.

The use of Twitter for newsgathering is apt to reduce the distance between social media and journalistic coverage as distinct communication channels. It feeds into and reinforces the growing skepticism about the credibility of conventional media as they become more reliant on tweets as sources of questionable authenticity.

Directly related to the use of social media posts is the observed decline in civility in the 2016 political campaign. For several years now, noted scholars of the Internet have written about the “echo chamber effect” of social media. This is a phenomenon in which beliefs are cyclically reinforced by the re-transmission of opinions inside a self-secluded system of information; echo chambers operate at the expense of competing viewpoints which are either underrepresented or censored outright. The result is a progressively more polarized electorate, firmly attuned to like-minded views and growingly intolerant of divergent opinions.

While the tone of the 2016 campaign may not yet rival the xenophobic attitudes of 1950s McCarthyism, the nativist fervor of the Know-Nothing campaigns of the 1850s, or the vitriolic politics that led to the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr in 1804, only the future will tell whether the political climate will worsen or improve after the conclusion of the current election cycle.

Sources for further study:

- Dan Balz and Haynes Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election* (Viking, 2009)
- Matthew Das Sarma, “Tweeting 2016: How Social Media is Shaping the Presidential Election,” *Inquiries Journal*, 2016
- Susan Herbst, *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics* (Temple University Press, 2010)
- Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President 1968* (Simon & Schuster, 1969)
- Kristina Monllos, “By the Numbers: How Presidential Candidates Stack Up on Social Media,” *AdWeek*, 13 September 2015
- Costas Panagopoulos, ed., *Strategy, Money and Technology in the 2008 Presidential Election* (Routledge, 2011)
- W. James Potter, *Media Literacy* (SAGE Publications, 2016)
- Stephanie Petrich, “Assessing Network TV Ad Watches in the 2012 Presidential Election,” *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, Spring 2013
- Theodore White, *America in Search of Itself: The Making of the President, 1956-1980* (Harper and Row, 1982)

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. Do you believe that you have been positively or negatively influenced by candidate- or PAC-sponsored political advertisements? If so, how?
2. In general, do you consider the media a reliable source information? Why/why not?
3. What, in your opinion, is the role of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) in formulating and guiding the political discourse in the United States?

Mad Me

By Donna Decker, Ph.D.
Professor, English

When my daughter was very young, she began her Mad Me journal, an invention born of necessity. In my household, where I was single mother to three young children, we aimed for civility. That is, certain phrases were off limits. We could not call each other “stupid” or “dumb.” We could not tell each other to “shut up.” We could not swear. We did not hit. Yet, we got angry with each other, frustrated beyond belief sometimes. And smashing a pillow against a headboard simply did not cut it. So my daughter asked if she could keep a journal she would come to call her Mad Me.

“Can I have a journal and write my truest feelings in it. Like if I really want Caitlin to get out of my sight, but I can’t say things like ‘get the hell out of here,’ can I just hide out in my closet and write? Can I even swear if I don’t say it out loud?”

“Sure,” I conceded.

I thought of that journal during the presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. I wanted to dig it out and write all of the most horrible words I knew. I could not Tweet them. I would not Facebook them. I could barely breathe with them swirling about my head. The lack of civility, the lurking, the volatile tone, the downright bad behavior I was witnessing on that stage, brought me low when I very much wanted to go high. Were these my children, they would have been in a serious time out.

It wasn’t just my daughter’s Mad Me that came to mind during those long debate nights, as I rested into yet another commercial for cell phones. It was my nine years of doctoral work on what Soviet theorist Mikhail Bakhtin called “authoritative discourse.” Alastair Renfrew maintains “Bakhtin emerges ... as a key thinker for the Humanities in the twenty-first century,” and he is spot on.

Authoritative discourse, as Bakhtin explains it, considers itself above, and therefore exempt from, the need to dialogue. If authoritative discourse is universally true, as it considers itself by definition, then it need not discuss anything with anyone who might threaten its authority. On one of those debate stages, Martha Raddatz and Anderson Cooper tried to engage authoritative discourse, get it to dialogue.

They refused to accept platitudinous or evasive responses. To no avail.

Because authoritative discourse does not engage. It takes umbrage at the very idea that it should engage in dialogue. It pontificates and repeats and raises its voice.

I found myself wanting a Mad Me to relieve my vexation. I managed to Tweet innocuous things like “words matter” and “please answer the question.” But I worried and wondered what was happening to our country. I had managed to orchestrate my home such that civility was the norm. In the university classrooms where I teach young people English, I urge my students to consider others’ points of view on the world and to examine the ways in which they have come to hold their own worldviews. I ask them

to consider the multiple perspectives offered within a literary text and within the classroom in which that text is being explored. It has been my life’s work to promote civil discourse and fierce empathy and to balk at hasty judgment. Judgment is, after all, substituting one story for another “truer” story, a story that is palatable to the ego of the judge.

Granted, the task of listening to others with fierce empathy is Herculean, but I have long believed that humans are capable of a deep empathy and the courage it takes to listen to views contrary to one’s own. But that is not what I am witnessing on the debate stages. There is little deliberation,

little humility. What I am seeing is not presidential, not civil. It is authoritative discourse run amok and weaponized.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof made a plea, “Professors, We Need You!” in 2014 to contribute to public discussions and debates about social, cultural, and political issues. “As academics,” urges V. Lee Badgett, “we should be role models for passionate but thoughtful debates, using facts and complex ideas instead of sound bites. We can model agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable” (17). So many of us, educators – and parents -- try to answer Kristof’s call, respond to Badgett’s coaching. To model disagreeing without being disagreeable, to practice Martin Luther King’s nonviolent direct action. Yet, what is being offered in this national election to our students and our children is a farcical hyper-drama, a war of words, a display of incivility

that shames us as a nation.

It is time to speak, to Tweet, to hashtag, to act: to insist that authoritative discourse is the Emperor with no clothes. That dialogue and civil discourse are the way of our nation. Words matter, but even more so, kindness matters.

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. What is the role of a parent in teaching civil discourse? Of a teacher?
2. What lessons about democracy have you learned from observing adult reactions to the 2016 election?
3. What are some of the ways you have found to cope with the hurt caused by uncivil discourse and hurtful words? How might those coping mechanisms be applied on a national scale?

“[T]he task of listening to others with fierce empathy is Herculean, but I have long believed that humans are capable of a deep empathy and the courage it takes to listen to views contrary to one’s own. But that is not what I am witnessing on the debate stages. There is little deliberation, little humility. What I am seeing is not presidential, not civil. It is authoritative discourse run amok and weaponized.”

We who benefit from the Constitution must keep community alive

By Paul Bush, MFA
Associate Professor, Communication

I remember the first time I encountered the word civility. It was plastered all over the walls at “ZooMass,” which is the nickname some students have for the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

I remember seeing the posters proclaiming the upcoming “year of civility.” That was a long time ago now, but what I can still clearly remember thinking was, “What a dumb word.”

I’m now a college professor and this is a civility study guide, but if I’m honest, I have to say that. I’m sorry, but it is. “Civility” is just so clunky and uninspiring. When I hear it, the most exciting thing that pops into my mind is a marble frieze of a bunch of Roman aristocrats and generals standing around looking noble. “Civility” isn’t a lively word that just explodes out of your mouth. And before anyone starts saying I can’t talk this way, you tell me - if “civility” is such an exciting word, how many song lyrics you can list that use that word.

Sadly, I consider all of this a curse, because we badly need a word that can inspire us to action.

We Americans have entered an age where mutual respect no longer appears to be a fundamental standard of life, an expectation that no one but the most degenerate would violate in public life. Our entrance into this age has been building for a while, but the election of 2016 seems to have opened the door to all sorts of vile behavior. Racism, misogyny, hatred and ignorance have all been given license - they’ve become okay.

Sadly, this isn’t a new age. We’ve gone through these times before, when all of these attitudes have actually been practiced openly. The consequences have been horrific, because all of these things make targets out of individuals and groups. More than mere opinions or viewpoints, they’re weapons. And we are all under threat if the glue of respect and safety that holds our community together weakens and cracks.

How did we get to this precarious state? I blame journalists and the media.

Let me be clear: I blame both journalists and the media. The two are related, but different, and both

have helped lead us to our present state. Journalists are the professionals who dedicate themselves to providing the public the information it needs to make decisions, whether the people like that information or would rather look at cat videos instead. Media - a faceless word, if ever there was - is

driven by the corporate desire to make a profit, something synonymous with ratings and audience appeal. If you want a way of telling the two apart, ask yourself if the person talking on screen or writing in the article is aiming for your brain or trying to make you angry or upset.

Most journalists admit that they have a role in democracy; after all, they’ve been given special protection in the First Amendment, which prohibits Congress from cutting into the freedom of the press. However, it seems to me that over the course of the 2016 election many journalists see themselves as only bit players, not supporting actors, in our democracy.

They certainly have failed to recognize that democracy means community - if democracy grows from community and from the premise that good government depends on every member of a community having their voice valued. When the very things that hold community together are threatened, then democracy is threatened as well.

Journalists who don’t point out that community is being threatened are failing in their duties, and I think we’ve seen a lot of that this election season. But what we’ve also seen leading up to this election is the media’s blind drive for ratings. Shouting and assertion have replaced discussion and thoughtfulness, and why not? We, the audience, tune in.

The problem with this ratings-driven approach to programming is that it helps set - or perhaps I should say, destroy - community standards. A failure to listen to each other easily slips into contempt for others. But I’m also sure that the media can find ways to entertain us and to make lots of money that don’t involve playing up anger and hate for others.

Of course, there’s another aspect of the First Amendment we have to consider: the freedom of speech. We can’t just say, “Don’t do that.” We can’t force either journalists or the media to be civil. Instead, the resolution lies with us, the public - the

community.

We need to understand how fragile the ties are that bind us together. Mutual respect doesn’t mean we have to love people who we think are jerks, but we do need to see it as an essential ingredient in community - and we do need to acknowledge that all of us, including journalists and the media, need to protect it, even when politicians are yelling at each other.

I think it’s essential we agree that all who benefit from the protections of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights also have responsibilities to keep community alive, whether it’s an election year or not.

Making this happen won’t be easy. But maybe it would help the process along if someone would come up with some sexy, song-worthy words for civility and the other essential ingredients of community.

Potential Discussion Prompts:

1. The author obviously doesn’t like the term “civility.” What words or phrases does he use instead?
2. What does the author mean that journalists and media are different? Can you give examples of people who try to inform the public, even when the news is boring and not “sexy”? Can you provide examples of media that are more concerned with keeping a big audience and
3. What words can you come up with that the author would think sound better than “civility”?
4. Can you create any song lyrics that point out what will happen to us if we don’t do something about civility being undermined? (Hint: focus on a person who should be doing something to protect civility.)

The Marlin Fitzwater Center for Communication is dedicated to educating leaders of conscience in public communication.



Presidency and the Press

This week-long summer conference allows high school students to engage in the dynamics of presidential election politics, the role of the media who cover it, and the relationship between the two. Every speaker, every tour, every interview is designed to give these young people the skills and information they need for full participation in the Presidential Election.



Franklin Pierce University Polling

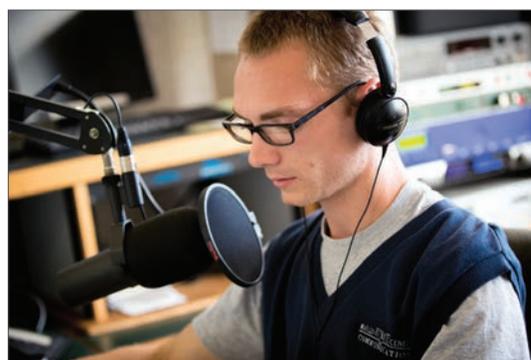
In partnership with the *Boston Herald* and RKM Research & Communications, Inc., Franklin Pierce allows students to participate in the political polling process. Beginning with the New Hampshire primary, they worked with a pollster to collect data, wrote columns for publication, and interviewed live on Boston Herald Radio. PoliticsFitzU will continue to follow the election cycle all the way to the Presidential Inauguration, which includes a trip to Washington, D.C. This collaboration has been recognized by the Associated Press Media Editors with an Honorable Mention for Community Engagement.

franklinpierce.edu/fitz15



Fitzwater Honors

The Fitzwater Center is an arena that recognizes excellence—spanning from high school students to established professionals. The Center grants annual scholarships to students who have expressed an interest in media or politics, throughout their high school career. In addition, an annual honors ceremony awards medallions for Leadership in Public Communication. Recent recipients include Joseph Sciacca (Editor-in-Chief, *Boston Herald*), Jeff Bartlett (General Manager, WMUR TV), Candy Crowley (host, “State of the Union, CNN), and Juan Williams (Political News Analyst, Fox News).



Pierce Media Group

In today’s interconnected world, media spans all arenas—print, radio, television, and digital—and that’s what the Pierce Media Group explores every day. Students join the newspaper staff to produce the *Pierce Arrow*, a printed edition, and the *Exchange*, an online paper. They also host their own television and radio stations in on-campus studios and enjoy the opportunity to broadcast live on internet radio.

FranklinPierce
UNIVERSITY