Presidential Debates

Presidential Debates

FORTY YEARS OF HIGH-RISK TV

Alan Schroeder

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Publishers Since 1893

New York Chichester, West Sussex

Copyright © 2000 Columbia University Press All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schroeder, Alan, 1954-

Presidential debates : forty years of high-risk TV /

Alan Schroeder.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-231-11400-1 (cloth)

ISBN 0-231-11401-x (paper)

1. Campaign debates—United States.

2. Television in politics—United States.

3. Presidents—United States—Election.

I. Title: Forty years of high-risk TV. II. Title.

JF2112.D43 S37 2000

324.7'3'0973—dc21 00-035831



Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America Designed by Audrey Smith

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO Carl, Jennifer, and Kirsten Schroeder, and Dan Hammons

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

Introduction: The First Presidential Debate 1

Part I: Preproduction

Chapter One: The Predebate Debate 13 Chapter Two: Strategy and Preparation 38 Chapter Three: Predebate News Coverage 65

Part II: PRODUCTION

Chapter Four: The Debaters 95 Chapter Five: The Questioners 124 Chapter Six: The Productions 148

viii Contents

Part III: POSTPRODUCTION

Chapter Seven: Postdebate News Coverage 173

Chapter Eight: The Audience 200

Conclusion: The Future of Presidential Debates 215

NOTES 223

REFERENCES 253

SCHEDULE OF TELEVISED PRESIDENTIAL

AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: 1960-1996 259

INDEX 263

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge the many individuals who have made this book possible. Particular thanks are owed to those whose contributions went beyond the call of duty and whose guidance put me on a path to other valuable sources: Bob Asman, Bob Barnett, Rick Berke, David Broder, Janet Brown, Marty Brownstein, Hal Bruno, Diana Carlin, Steve Chaggaris, Steve Doocy, Ed Fouhy, Bob Goodwin, James Hoge, Mickey Kantor, Joshua King, Jim Lehrer, Richard C. Leone, Barry Paris, Marty Plissner, Sam Popkin, Adam Rosman, Kevin Sauter, Carole Simpson, Margaret Warner, Brady Williamson, and Judy Woodruff. I also thank Claire Denzler and Hank Price at WBBM in Chicago, Roma Hare at WETA in Washington, D.C., and Erin O'Connor at NBC New York.

I am indebted to Gary Orren and Marvin Kalb, my professors at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, as well as Pippa Norris of the *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, for their encouragement.

Thanks, too, to the staffs of the various libraries and archives used in my

x Acknowledgments

research, especially John Lynch at the Vanderbilt Television News Archives; Bruce Dumont at the Chicago Museum of Broadcasting; Jim Cidrone of the John F. Kennedy Library; Susan Naulty of the Richard Nixon Library; Bob Bohannon and David Stanhope at the Jimmy Carter Library; Geir Gundersen of the Gerald R. Ford Library; Mike Dugan of the Ronald Reagan Library; Linda L. Schuler of the Ronald Reagan Center for Public Affairs; Debbie Carter of the George Bush Library; and others on the efficient and helpful staffs at the Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush libraries, as well as the Library of Congress.

My grateful appreciation goes to Ann Miller of Columbia University Press for her confidence and direction during the writing process. I also thank Liz Hartman, Anne McCoy, and Ron Harris of Columbia University Press and Rita Bernhard for her invaluable editorial suggestions.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues at Northeastern University in Boston. This project was generously supported by a research and development grant from the Office of the Provost and by faculty development stipends from the School of Journalism. Thanks to Dean James Stellar and associate deans Malcolm Hill and Kay Onan in the College of Arts and Sciences, and, most particularly, my compatriots in the School of Journalism: Belle Adler, Nicholas Daniloff, Charles Fountain, William Kirtz, Laurel Leff, Gladys McKie, and James Ross. Your support and friendship are deeply appreciated.

Presidential Debates