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Advances in Research Using the C-SPAN Archives

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FOREWORD

I was one of those geeky teenagers who watched C-SPAN. There are probably more of us out there than who will admit to it. Although I enjoyed watching a good congressional debate, what I really enjoyed was C-SPAN's coverage of the campaign trail. I was exhilarated when C-SPAN would clip a microphone to a presidential candidate and let me "ride along" as he (and occasionally she) shook hands with voters in a donut shop in New Hampshire or in a pizza place in Wisconsin. Growing up in Iowa, I especially recall watching residents of my home state gather at middle schools to participate in caucus meetings, and I recall watching the luminaries in the Democratic Party gather in a farm field for Senator Tom Harkin's Steak Fry. My interest in campaigns turned into an academic career, and I now publish extensively in the area of political communication, focusing on how campaigns target their appeals to various types of voters, often times through their political advertising.

When Robert Browning created the C-SPAN Video Library almost 30 years ago, he certainly made the lives of teens who geek out on politics a lot brighter, but he did so much more. First, he provided a vast data resource for those who study American politics. Second, he provided an amazing tool for educators to use. There was one point in my teaching career when I would reach for a VHS tape with a yellowed label (recorded in 2000) in order to show my students what really happened at a presidential nominating caucus; today, of course, I can call up that same video online from Purdue. But most fundamentally, when Browning started the C-SPAN Video Library, he created a video history of American democracy. We can't thank him enough for his foresight.

The chapters in this edited collection are stellar examples of the types of research that can come out of the C-SPAN archive. The research questions posed—and answered—are varied, ranging from whether liberal and conservatives use those ideological labels differently in their speech (most definitely!) to whether men and women use different words in campaign debates (no!) and how President Bill Clinton avoided blame during the Lewinsky scandal (through the smart use of rhetorical strategies). And the methods employed run the gamut, from content analysis to statistical modeling to rhetorical analysis. As a scholar, I was excited by all of the new insights I gained about American politics. As an educator, I was excited by the potential of assigning this volume to students in a research methods course, as it demonstrates how smart researchers can successfully take multiple approaches even when using the same data.

As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the C-SPAN Video Library in 2017, it is important to celebrate the successes of the archive, to take stock of its current uses, and to plan for the future. There is no better way to do so than through the publication of this collection of essays. I trust that you, the reader, will enjoy it as much as I did. And now I must get back to the task of searching for some of those videos that so intrigued me in my younger days.

Travis N. Ridout

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