



Acting Political: How do Performers Utilize Their Acting Background in Politics from Reagan to Trump

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Acting Political: How do Performers Utilize Their Acting Background in Politics from Reagan to
Trump

Jeanmarie Hajla

A Thesis in the Field of Dramatic Arts
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

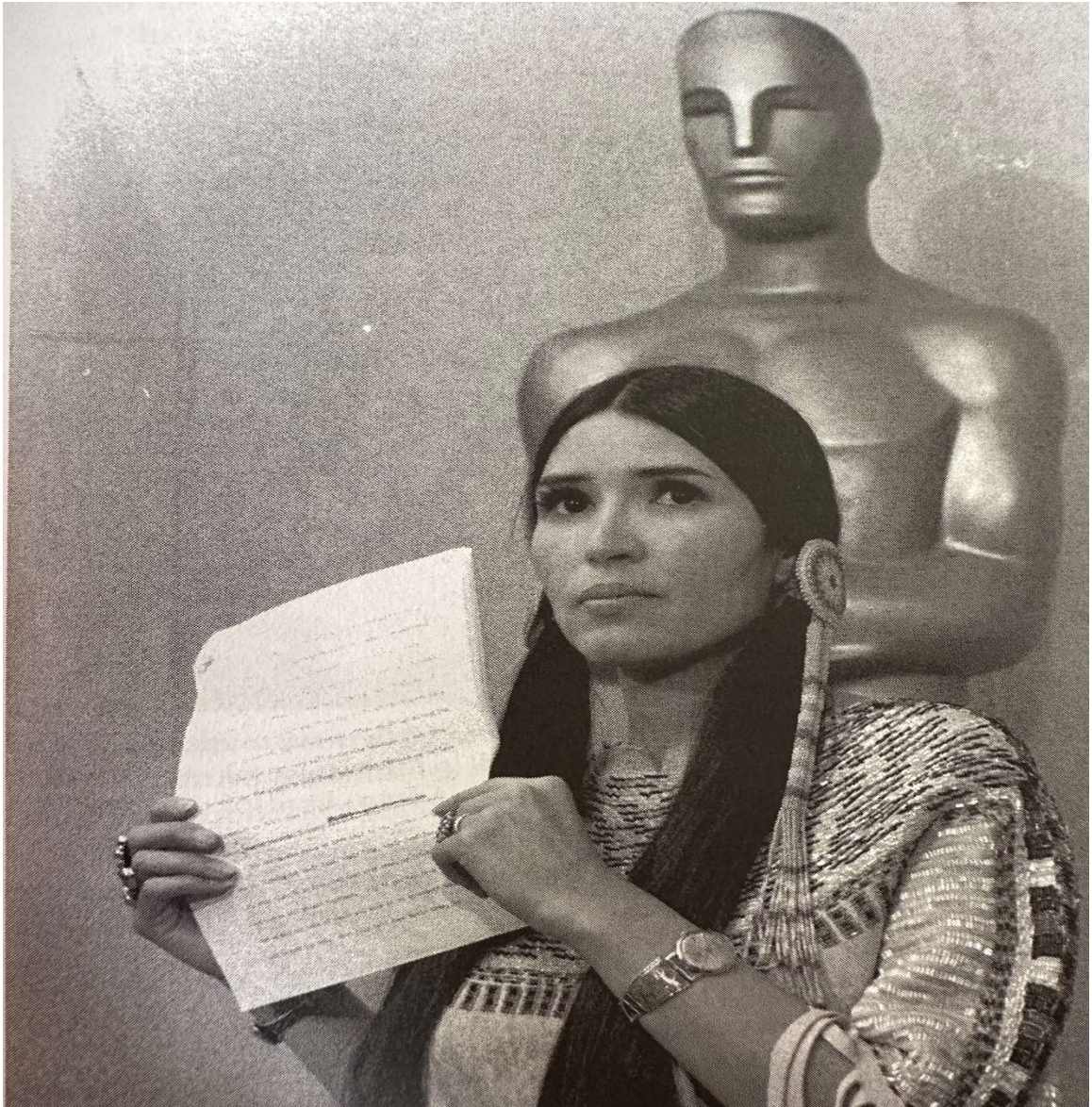
The objective of this thesis is to analyze how politicians with backgrounds in performance can use their previous acting training in politics. While doing so, the goal will also be to find out if it is really to the actor's and their audience's advantage. This will allow for the analysis of how their acting career is also utilized in their political performance for the country they serve. There are many well-deserved politicians that have spent years working diligently, paying their dues to get into politics, understanding how all the gears work together to run the country. A braver actor may feel confident enough to start out in this field later in life thinking that they can master this new skill easily because of a previously successful acting career.

When a well-known actor has assumed a political position, this leaves the question of how well these actors are performing in their newfound role of politics. With this perspective, the question arises if this career change is just to help the actor hold onto some limelight as their acting career fades away or if it is indeed their new calling.

The best way to find out if actors are on the right path within a career change is to see how performers utilize their theatrical training background in politics towards a political goal. Delving into their life before acting can also reveal if acting may have gotten in the way of a political career earlier in their life which may have led the actor on an even more successful, long-term political career. This path of research will also allow the thesis to tell us if their new calling is intrinsic to the political realm.

With these different objectives the thesis will aim for a thorough analysis resulting in a well-founded answer based on all these above aspects being put together.

Frontispiece



“Sacheen Littlefeather” at the 1973 Academy Awards in Los Angeles. The actress, Maria Cruz who portrayed a Native Indian, stated that Marlon Brando declined his Oscar for Best Actor due to his role in the Godfather as a protest of the Native Americans against their portrayal in TV and film (Critchlow & Raymond 213).

Author's Biographical Sketch

Jeanmarie was raised in Connecticut and spent many years in Manhattan working in theater and film. She studied Communications at the University of Connecticut and worked part time in the New York Director's Guild while acting in CBS Studios, Silvercup Studios, Atlantic Theater (which is run by the famous actor William Macy) as well as various roles behind the scenes in jobs that ranged from camera assistant to stage manager in many venues such as the Beckett Theater. This allowed her to become proficient in make-up eventually landing in a more stable Aesthetics career with New York and Florida licenses. She ventured into different Aesthetic positions over the last 25 years leading to the medical side of Aesthetics. Her career varied from working in the spa at the Ritz Carlton to working with patients in plastic surgery as a laser technician and then finally as a Medical Aesthetic consultant. When she was a Medical Aesthetics teacher in Keiser Career College, she realized her passion for teaching. She transitioned into insurance around the time of Covid and currently has a 2-15 and a 4-40 insurance license. She is currently working in Insurance supplements for a company via a teacher's union that only sells to schools. Since she has spent her free time immersed in volunteer work teaching acting to foster children, she decided to become officially accredited in the field leading to her current studies. Her greatest endeavor to date has been working as a volunteer for the Humane Society trying to get legislature to pass a bill that will abolish puppy mills.

Acknowledgements

The final edits after a long journey to get to the final submission of my thesis was greatly aided by Trudi Goldberg Pires, the Executive Assistant to the Dean of Academic Programs. Trudi was my safe space where we were able to comb through all my technical challenges, especially since I used a Mac for writing which did not like the Word format for editing!

Numerous sources were obtained with help from the Harvard research librarian Stephen Kuehler. He was extraordinarily helpful providing information for the task at hand. The suggestions that were made along with our discussions were thought provoking and informative. This dialogue and subsequent information helped the research to be offset by the limited resources of small local libraries.

Thank you to Professor Michael D. Miner, PhD. As an advisor, I did not know it was possible to be graceful when delivering multiple, tremendously useful corrections. My determination in not being crushed was especially helpful to get through this paper.

Finally, I would also like to thank Professor Richard Joseph Martin who aligned myself with Dr. Miner. It was such a wonderful partnership. I am so very grateful that the journey was actually enjoyable due to Dr. Miner and my personality being in an ideal alignment to do this tedious work!

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my brother. He has inspired me to always better myself and even though this could be painful at times. It was motivational towards the journey down this path. My lack of faith in myself was encountered by his unwavering faith of my potential. His insightful knowing of me led me to follow in his footsteps of pursuing education all the way to his Doctorate later in life. I thank him for his tough love and tenacity.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“I think people involved in politics make good actors. Acting and politics both involve fooling people. People like being fooled by actors. When you get right down to it they probably like being fooled by politicians even more. A skillful actor will make you think, but a skillful politician will make you never have to think.”

—Donna Brazile

The world of politics is already dramatic. One may feel that this would be a natural realm for actors to delve into. This thesis poses the question of actors going into politics and if their acting career can be useful for such a career change.

Is a career change later in life due to the actor's realization of becoming washed up? A new career would most definitely bring the actor new celebrity status not in the way of glamor but through a way in which age is looked upon as a benefit, not a detriment, for its wisdom that aids real life leadership skills.

In this new role, the actor may also be in a time period where the ego needs to attain a real accomplishment in life, not a fairytale storyline to follow. The need for substance would line up with a person later in life.

The apparent confidence in this new position will help, but how far will this get them? The fact that there are already so many actors out there trying this out leads to the

most important question of if they are doing a good job or hurting us? Since this affects all of us, this thesis will help us to understand this more.

This thesis will aim to find the answer to the question of if acting does indeed lead to better performance in politics. It will be determined if these actors-turned-politicians did make a change for the better in the world in their new role as a politician. The comparisons among the actors will give us a platform on which to base trends. This, in turn, will address specific ramifications of these actor's newfound roles.

Politics as its own entity will also be separated from the celebrity to see how it fared from the actors' actions themselves. The thesis will accomplish this by utilization of a fake character, such as a comic character. This will afford a view with an attempt to remove human emotional attachment allowing for a different perspective. The thesis will clarify if there is enough gravity given to the politician's new career or if political concerns were not addressed well enough due to a lack of experience from the actor, especially due to his own selfish emotions and desires.

This thesis will also address those actors who didn't make it into politics but tried. We will investigate the reasons why these particular actors didn't get elected. In addition to this analysis, a role reversal will be provided with an example of a politician getting into acting. Does this prove that acting is easy to slip into due to the fact politics could have proven a training ground?

The analysis of leaders who were never actors or actors who never wanted to be involved in politics show how they were affected by their unintentional entry into the realm. The next to last aspect of the thesis will be putting the importance of acting in

politics into place to the point of human survival. Can we trust that acting really has the capability to help a human survive?

Finally, historical events utilizing acting within politics will allow the reader to see the fact that this situation has been around longer than anyone in current day would imagine. History repeating itself will also guarantee the fact that this political conundrum will be around much longer after we are gone, possibly involving another form of government being developed maybe due to a world crisis.

Key Terms

The first thing this thesis starts with is defining key terms that will set an underpinning for understanding the political perspective. We start with “Green Lanternism” (Dickerson 82); this stems from a comic book character whose power is determined by his will. This term was created by the political scientist Brendan Nyhan as reported in John Dickerson’s book *Hardest Job in The World; The American Presidency*. It involves the audience agreeing with the speaker no matter what the speech is if statements are made in earnest. If the audience perceives an absence of integrity then the speaker’s strength is diminished.

When the orator delivers his words with no conviction and overpromises, then the leader’s personality is said to not be strong enough. This is a fun, imaginative way to see the power any one can have with influence over any audience. This is also an unassailable view of actors in which the method of acting, as former actor and President Ronald Wilson Reagan said, is imperative. Reagan stated: “How could a president not be an actor” (Dickerson 68). Reagan considered that the responsibilities of reality stars and

Broadway performers to be in line with presidential entertainment demands. If an actor is able to use his training well, then he can utilize his tools to convince his audience.

During a performance, the actor can use this focus on his co-actors and this practice can be turned towards a large audience which will allow him to appear more convincing to more viewers. The audience can see, or at least sense, if there is bad acting at work because they are not convinced by the performance. This conviction of a leader to his promises can read true and give him not only more popularity with a better political influence but eventually possible better ratings when it comes to voting time. This thesis will ascertain if this is a vital part to an actor turned politician's success.

The next key term is "Parasocial Bond." These relationships are one-sided psychological bonds with specific media figures such as popular celebrities or fictional characters. The effects of the "Parasocial Bond" are "experienced as real and thus elicit cognitive, affective and behavioral responses that are similar to those of real relationships" (Gabriel, Paravati, Green and Flomsbee 1). This effect was so strong that even though all of Trump's outrageous statements, people could relate to him because of his TV personality. The most surprising fact of all was that, "these effects were particularly strong for those whose votes were a surprise in the election: people who did not identify with the Republican party" (Gabriel, Paravati, Green and Flomsbee 1). This would explain the power Trump has had over his viewers even if they know he is not the best candidate.

Illusory Truth Effect is the next term. This term coincides with Polarization along with Moral Flattening from Dickerson's book. These are all in juxtaposition to the first key term "Green Lanternism". Illusory Truth Effect refers to the findings of Yale

psychologists that the mention of a false event even once by a political claim increases its belief even more so with repetition. Even President George Washington stated that his negative impressions of the Native Americans grew because they “have no Press thro’ which their grievances are related” (Dickerson 350).

The thesis will take this perspective to analyze the power of leaders repetitiously lying to their audience. This effect combined with “Parasocial Bond” relationships have many Americans believing anything Trump makes up due to his familiarity from his previous television appearances. “Parasocial Bonds’ with Trump were also a significant predictor of his popularity even though there was always an underlying feeling of mistrust. His previous career of acting was utilized in his political career.

Polarization, connected with the historical ironic behaviors of leaders such as former President Thomas Jefferson writing the Declaration of Independence yet while having numerous slaves. The inventor, author, scientist, and diplomat Benjamin Franklin, was part of the development of the Declaration of Independence while also owning slaves and this is an example of what the thesis will consider versions of the Illusory Truth Effect found in its sub definitions of Polarization. These leaders have their own lives which they continue to lead even if not ethical. Franklin established standards and Jefferson influenced writers of the Constitution of the United States for others to follow. They are living in their own world. They did not have as large scale an audience as present-day media provides which would have reflected their behavior back to them many times over.

The fact that these leaders did not have mass celebrity before their political career shows us that they were able to lead their hypocritical lives in private where there was no

chastisement from their followers. This was a proponent of the continuation of slavery in their own lives. Historically, there is hardly any mention of this hypocrisy.

The possibility of these leaders not being able to be truly reflective may also stem from not having an acting background where they would have been forced to be seen by more fans via “Parasocial Bond” under a magnifying glass. Still, these leaders had to live with their conscience. This all leads to Moral Flattening, this is the other subset definition of lowering our moral standards due to outside influences.

The next key term is Weaponizing Uncertainty. This was initially created by the *New York Times* bestselling author Casandra Brene’ Brown, PhD, LMSW and research professor at the University of Houston. This term was introduced in her book *Dare to Lead*; her term was also utilized in the book *Hardest Job in The World; The American Presidency* by John Dickerson. Weaponizing Uncertainty describes when it is common for leaders to utilize an audience’s fear in times of uncertainty “...to their advantage” (Brown 104).

Brown states that this has been historically easy to put into play, where this fear combined with an enemy to blame will lead people to do almost anything. In Dickerson’s book it was also mentioned that “Of all the campaign promises Donald Trump has kept, the one he has kept with the most fervor has been his promise to be an unconventional president” (Dickerson 184). Even Trump’s speech pattern is consistently uncertain.

Acting having led to the development of the aforementioned “Parasocial Bond” the power that a leader has over the audience can be dangerous. As an example of the effect of Weaponizing Uncertainty, David Duke, the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan,

stated, “We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump” (Dickerson 59). This was inspired by Trump’s consistent statements of taking America back. Trump’s reply to resultant aggressive attacks was just as ambivalent stating there was “... violence on many sides” (Dickerson 60).

This uncertainty inspires the personal interpretation of each individual audience member, some of which are not well informed. Hence the thesis reflects the power of acting and the term “Parasocial Bond”. This uncertainty combined with familiarity can cause unclear communication to lead to a terrifying historical event.

An audience that is drawn to any suggestion because of the stoking of fear allows the political speaker to give the audience false comfort with the leader hence Weaponizing Uncertainty. This takes us down the path of the unfair power of the actor turned politician not only for his political constituents but the unfairness to his followers. Followers are being misled by the glamor of the world of performance especially in tumultuous times and this has led to dangerous outcomes. The question now is also if the audience consists of qualified voters. In this thesis I will analyze these conflicting theories.

Leaders Utilizing Acting

The analysis will commence with one of the most well-known political figures to date, Donald J. Trump. The fact that Trump inspired the topic of this thesis shows the level of influence he has in many different aspects. The fact that there is so much upheaval around his presidency was reason enough for the thesis to enter all the varying

sides of his leadership. The contrasts were so noteworthy that this thesis went beyond all original plans and created a more concise view of the inner workings of politics.

The next section of the thesis involves an in-depth analysis of the different perspectives of acting through actor and former California Governor Arnold Alois Schwarzenegger's personal experiences. When acting is combined with politics, this new perspective provides a comparative analysis of the effects of politicians with and without acting tools. The thesis will help the readers learn of their individual experiences that have led them not only into politics but to give the reader a chance to discern their qualifications, such as Schwarzenegger's, having been enough in their new roles.

This segment of the thesis will analyze a trend of the word "macho" being used that is consistent along many sources within the description of multiple leaders. This thesis will address this word to see if it's adequate to truly discern the qualifications of leaders. This analysis starts with former President James Earl Carter.

One of American's all-time favorite leaders, Reagan, will not escape the analysis of his leadership style and the reasons for his popularity. This work will ascertain if he is as much of a quality leader as he presents. This addresses behavior of initial reactionary movement of leaders called First Responders and the result this has on civilians' opinion of leaders. The thesis will delve further into the pattern of this strategy and the effect it has on the view civilians have of their leaders.

The thesis will start into the analysis of politicians who didn't come from a professional background. The harsh view audiences had on some of these political figures such as former President George Herbert Walker Bush was undeserved.

Two politicians, Former President Barack Hussein Obama and Senator Willard Mitt Romney, are utilized to compare acting tactics since their interactions were catalytic and the results were very poignant. As for the non-thespian politicians, the thesis will do a comparative analysis to each other in which we can see the results of not having an acting background and surmise if that may be advantageous to the job of leadership.

This example is made through Reagan and a marketing guru, Roger Eugene Ailes, former Fox news CEO. The skill of acting alone does not explain how theories become so believable in real life that its shock value is when the truth is revealed which has turned the word politician into a dirty word.

After the thesis has attempted to re-sync the playing field, then it will analyze the path of politicians that were never actors and the public's view of their performance without much thespian training, such as President Richard Milhous Nixon. From this new vantage point, the thesis will be able to navigate the effect an acting background had on former leaders in contrast to a leader without this formidable training.

Actors' Unfavorable Encounters with Politics

Once there is an established understanding of these two aspects of politicians with and without an acting background, we will go deeper into the trends of a consistent description of these leaders starting in Chapter III. This will allow the reader to connect to their success or failure from the audience's view of their leadership roles. An exemplary actor of this exact challenge is former Mayor of Carmel-by the-Sea Clinton Eastwood Jr.. His encounter with politics originally seems to be for the good of all, but when we investigate it further there is a self-serving catalyst behind it all. There is also the analysis of these actors under duress where we see the shift in personality appearing

to go from reality into acting. The most recent example of this via Willard Carroll Smith's altercation with Christopher Julius Rock will also be analyzed. With this perspective, the thesis will take the leadership role out of the equation and then in its place, put an example of an actor, such as Marlon Brando, who was not a politician, into focus. This new idea will give the reader a chance to see an actor having dabbled in politics even though the result is a grand effect on his overall reputation.

With the circumnavigation of the actor's encounter with politics the thesis will take the view of an actor, Rock Hudson (Roy Harold Sherer, Jr.), who was not political, but had to go public with a very sensitive topic of his having AIDS. This will give another perspective of the effect the actor himself has on political topics. The thesis will then do a review of a few actors such as Ashley Judd and Cythina Ellen Nixon, who have tried to enter politics but were not successful.

Separating Actors from Politics

This work will analyze the interaction of actors and politics and why it is combined in the first place. (This will be discussed in more detail later in Chapter III.) The observation of this duality allows us to see each of these subjects in a separate light so to appreciate their individuality and push us to see the factors that result from the combination of the two. This will be accomplished through the interjection of the character Captain America, a character who affords the chance to utilize a non-human persona to remove some attached emotion in the thesis' analysis. Richard J. Stevens' book on this character has masculinity and violence tied together on the front cover as part of the title. It is as if he is catering to the tied turbulence of the two ideas as do most Americans. The other description he utilizes to continue the idea of this attachment on

the cover of his book is National Icon. This reflects the acceptance of the more negative behavior of the character utilizing patriotism in an exemplary light. The political involvement of Captain America has had a vicissitude that is just the same as our present-day politicians. The turbulence of politics allows a strong leader to get away with more.

Role Reversal

The thesis will utilize Fred Dalton Thompson, who was an attorney that went into acting, starting with a role portraying himself! This will be near the end of Chapter III, before the “Research Limitations” section. Thompson eventually went into politics and then had a steady role on the TV show *Law and Order*. This portion will allow us to see a totally different perspective of the reversal of actors going into politics. In the next section, “Utilizing acting to survive” the thesis will pay homage to Ukrainian President Zelensky where he is implementing his acting skills which is helping him survive an almost impossible situation during war.

The final section will be on the history of theater in politics. Here, this piece will bring forth examples in this section of a trial that was based on acting. This was done in the hopes of drawing the public’s attention for a greater cause. The thesis will also show how politics can enter the religious realm even on a deeper level.

Roadmap

Within the five chapters of this work are the following: Part One consists of chapters I and II. Chapter I starts us off with the Introduction and Key Terms, which covers highlights of terminology that defines major points with definitions. These terms

thoroughly define the actions of our chosen subjects. An outline of research perspectives used aid in the understanding of our subjects' motivations.

The next few sections address how leaders utilize acting; non-political actors' encounters with politics and actors having politics forced upon them. A comic character utilized to distance the human aspect of politics without emotion relies on the character of Captain America to achieve this goal. The non-thespian politician, the failed politician actor, and the politician utilizing acting to survive, are followed by the history of theater in politics. These segments all give the reader different perspectives of the journey of different aspects of the actor or non-actor versus politics. The roadmap is used to clarify our chartered course. Also, in this section we analyze a politician that went into acting.

Chapter II provides an outline of our methodologies of literature review based on primary sources. This section identifies trends that are utilized in a consistent description of numerous leaders. This is followed by case studies of politically involved actors in which the thesis observes their actions not only individually but also in analogies to each other where any available literature expounds. This section then delves into the primary subject of leaders utilizing acting.

Chapter III is a segment on non-political actors which covers popular iconic actors where we can set up an underpinning for their interactions with political and non-political events and their effects on society. There is another sub-set of presidents that were never actors. This gives the reader a new perspective of the politician that has no experience with acting and the effects they experience without this skill.

This chapter contains politically involved actors as well as nonpolitical actors in case study examples. To help the analysis of candidates through the subject of acting we

utilize a historical comic character, Captain America. He is considered the epitome of masculinity, being all American as well as simultaneously being violent. This character is over 70 years old and captures America's turbulence of identifications. Chapter III also analyzes a politician that went into acting.

The thesis then takes acting out of the picture for analysis of the topic of Candidates that were never actors and finally we take politics out in the topic of actors that were not successful in politics and address why this may have happened. Did acting put them in a bad perspective to enter into politics, or were they just not qualified? If they weren't qualified, then what is that ingredient that makes actors successful in politics?

The tables are then turned from the vantage point of a politician getting into acting. This affords us the unique view of how thespian success can come even from a career that never had to do with acting. Finally, the last part covers research limitations. The thesis utilized this chapter to addresses actors that did not progress in politics. This segment covers the perspective of what the elements were of actors impressions on the audience before their political career and how this may have had an impact on the public's decision of the actor's involvement in politics.

Chapter IV addresses varied aspects such as leaders in other countries and how they utilize acting as well as politicians that went into acting as a role reversal perspective. The final chapter of the thesis is on the History of theatrics in politics leading us to a grounded summation of how acting and politics have emerged in conjunction with each other over time.

Chapter II

Research Method Primary Sources

“In politics, it’s very theatrical. There’s a lot of stage craft. The campaign is trying to tell a story that they want people to believe in, and candidates are playing the role, like actors, by a creative persona that people will be attracted to.”

—Beau Willimon

This study uses a case study approach to collecting evidence. The thesis utilizes videos of gubernatorial events, rallies, speeches and interviews. There are also multiple books and journal articles that achieve a thorough textual analysis of the politicians chosen thus far to help understand all facets of these individuals.

The thesis analyzes actors turned politicians along with non-political actors in order to do a comparative analysis of how they interrelate and compare with each other. There is a sampling from various interactions at political events between politicians so there is a common base of comparison on which a better understanding can be found for their success or failure. A version of discourse analysis is utilized to analyze how communication skills and styles can lead to the attainment of power in leadership.

The thesis’ methods for analyzing evidence are focusing on the comparison between the different backgrounds and behaviors before and after their political role. This combined with finding a common thread for comparison with acting as the base in

this formula will allow the thesis to branch into analysis of how this helps politicians succeed or how it may incur them to fail. The goal of the thesis is not to analyze multiple behavioral patterns since this would lead down too many confusing paths. The thesis will avoid a consensus analysis due to the overwhelming numerical data that would need to be provided.

Methodologies

Literature Review / Primary Sources

The trends evident in the scholarship deduced from multiple articles and books on some prominent political leaders do not have many comparisons between those figures. The one leader that has a large amount of peer reviewed journal articles is Donald Trump. He seems to be a catalyst for stirring up writers to vehemently produce numerous articles. The only other leader that seems to have had this inspiration, in a much more positive aspect, is Ronald Reagan.

The information on these two leaders formed a platform from which the thesis is able to base arguments on to form comparisons to other leaders. When there was an analogy involving Reagan or Trump the thesis was then able to gather much more scholarly information on other leaders only through comparison. Donald Trump, as a subject, has multiple amounts of peer reviewed journal articles that are relevant to the topic.

An example of the degradation of politics through acting was demonstrated by Trump. This topic was written about in the *Arizona Quarterly* stating, “When Donald Trump transformed the Capitol chamber into a stage set for future reality TV shows he

took the cultural work Ronald Reagan had performed in the same space and shifted the medium from Hollywood cinema to reality television” (Edwards 33). In this same article regarding Trump there is another quote involving Reagan stating, “We have seen a confusion of entertainment and politics before, most notably during the presidency of the former actor Ronald Reagan, whose presidency and the confusion of the simulacra of the president with the acts of the state...” (Edwards 33). Acting should be utilized as a tool to uphold the respect of the characters they portray and to give the storyline the appropriate attention. When acting becomes a tool used for mockery then it is being used in a manner which disregards the real truth to a point of distraction of the important issues at hand.

The subject of Reagan has an overwhelming number of sources. The secondary source books are preferable for analysis since it completes the point of view of an actor’s mind going into presidency that can only be obtained from an outside perspective looking in on his actions showing his thought process. The historical facts on Reagan are so complete before he became an actor that he is easily utilized as an example of influences of childhood before becoming an actor. His preference towards the display of strong actions seems to stem from a childhood that instilled insecurity.

The elder George Bush didn’t have much scholarly articles on him that involved a first-hand comparison to other political leaders, but he was described as wimpy in *The Hardest Job in The World; The American Presidency* by John Dickerson. There are still more negative key terms to describe Trump in the same book. Bush was also in a story with Reagan where again he became the underling. Bush was only connected to the word “macho” through another scholarly journal article in which Schwarzenegger was brought

in as well in regard to the 2004 election. This was very disappointing to be a focus of a well written article. This election was noted to “devolve into another old *Saturday Night* Live satire: *Quien es mas macho?*” (Messner 474). Dickerson’s book did bring other redeeming words and multiple key terms but still had a focus on Trump. Dickerson’s personal perspective slanted the narrative towards Trump as almost as if it was therapeutic journaling.

There are so many other more thoroughly descriptive words out there that this frequently chosen term of “macho” may reflect the simplicity of the description preference of a visceral American who is only attracted to the glamor of celebrity and drama but not the actual substance of politics.

This goes towards addressing the thesis’ question of if the political position should have gone to someone who wasn’t famous, but someone who had all the focused training for years to be in the position that the actor received so easily. The goal is to focus a spotlight on the fact that politics itself is not meant to be corrupted or owned by any individual or famous person. Politics is a tool with which to help our government run efficiently towards the result of making the world a better place.

The world assumes politics itself is evil where we forget it is the people behind the position. The actor should be analyzed while in their world of acting, and then while in politics, there should be another set of standards to be measured by. In an ideal world, this would be a better way to view the former actor turned politician. In the current world, there is an unfair advantage in comparison to other politicians that the former actor has once he has turned politician. This advantage once again may also not be what is in the best interest for the voters.

Not only did these actors turned politicians utilize their acting tools but there was a commonality of non-actor politicians resorting to theatrics to attain popularity. The examples encountered were all based on the same idea of a desperate situation sparking creativity in those politicians who realized the need to become an actor to survive. The irony in these situations was how the previously trained actors did seem to be able to have their leadership mistakes more easily forgiven possibly due to their familiarity as presented via “Parasocial Bond.” The non-trained actors were able to get away with acting even more so since no one would even suspect them of doing such a thing!

Leaders Utilizing Acting

Donald Trump was the first politician to have been the topic of a 1994 episode of *Beavis and Butt-Head* and then again *South Park* in 2001. These entertaining scenarios back up the thesis’ discussion of Trump’s not being considered a serious presidential choice. Further into this thesis, we bring in other fictional characters, from superheroes to comic characters.

The utilization of the above derogatory comic characters still seems to have a “Parasocial Bond” effect on its’ viewers. The familiarity of these bad comic examples still has a powerful result on the American people, especially during the elections.

A book written by Trump’s niece, Mary Lea Trump, on his inadequacies such as his acting background having turned his presidential role into a real-life reality show helps the thesis fill in the argument of his capability to be an effective president. Trump’s book in comparison helps the thesis explain his actions.

His niece’s book, *Too Much and Never Enough, How My Family Created the World’s Most Dangerous Man*, states, “Neither of his parents had interacted with him in a

way that helped him make sense of his world” (Trump 43). Her book also helps educate and warn the American people that have been so easily enticed by the glamor of the world of fame even formerly voting for him knowing that the potential candidate may not be the best choice due to his perverse background. The flip side of the coin also shows how Trump was so easily able to utilize his acting background to entice his anxious onlookers for the facade of a leader that could actually “Make America Great Again” (IMDb video). This motto was ironically used previously by one character, Gus Baker’s, speeches in the 1994 episode of *Beavis and Butt-Head*.

The fact that Trump’s acting background turned his presidential role into a real-life reality show has even influenced children as a 2020 “The Washington Post” report revealed that, students wielding Trump’s last name, “to harass children more than 300 times since the start of 2016,” which was focused on blacks, Muslims, and Hispanics (Natanson 1).

The segue from actor to president has also carried over the unnecessary drama with it. The report was a summation of what most Americans already felt due to Trump’s lack of true commitment to whatever side he chose to make a statement about in the moment. This is in no way the appropriate behavior for a President. It is surprising the key term “Green Lanternism” hasn’t come into a direct correlation with Trump’s behavior here. His presentations have been believable by his audience since there is his own self conviction to his own lies.

Trump’s former television show, *The Apprentice*, reflected America’s trend toward enjoying the challenges of others to escape their own personal misery in the monotony of their daily work grind through the quick firing of the cast. “You’re fired”

was the verbal drop of the ax where that cast member was embarrassed being so harshly judged on their performance and had to leave the show.

This established the atmosphere of Trump's show. An article from *Forbes* titled *More Than Half of U.S. Workers Are Unhappy In Their Jobs: Here's Why And What Needs To Be Done Now*, speaks to the "dissatisfaction of the typical American employee" (Kelly). These are the same people that watch *The Apprentice* and voted for Trump. The utilization of the key term by these American employees of "Parasocial Bond" is at its finest example here. This familiarity with Trump makes people forget their own live's troubles for a moment and provides some relief to their own personal challenges if not even for just a short period of time. This involves a typical voter "that is to the right" since there is no well-rounded view of the complete story except mainly from one side (Gramlich). Trump's previous acting career shown in this article proves to have influenced his political career and especially on his viewers.

The most ironic part of Trump's transition from celebrity to presidency is his utilization of the media. When it was to his favor then he had no problem with the media; he played into his roles and let the media scoop it all up. When he turned to politics, the focus went to his consistent contradictions. According to an article in the December 16, 2019 "The Washington Post", it was announced that after Trump's 1,055 days in office he had made 15,413 false or misleading claims.

This then led to Trump's complete disregard for the media to the point where he's been quoted as tweeting, "The FAKE NEWS media (failing@nytimes, @CNN, @NBCNews and many (others) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people, SICK!" (Goldberg 50). The irony here is how Trump had the media to thank for not only

his fame but his Presidency and then utilizes his acting career to try to have Americans turn against the media in the end. In addition, there is a total disregard for the level of respect the position of being a president deserves.

In an article on Trump, in contrast to his own previous actions, stated *The Apprentice* allowed him to learn to utilize television through his “ugliest remarks” (Poniewozik). This gave him publicity opportunities that made his followers consider him a straight shooter. The audience is enthralled since he was a reality star and the glamor blinds the reality of his constant contradictions. This behavior embodies the key term “Polarization” and the worst part of this is the resultant term “Moral Flattening” (Dickerson 60). The audience’s willingness to ignore the dark truth combines all of these in exchange for the glamor associated with the drama that takes them out of their own personal life challenges.

George Washington said, “When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly” (Dickerson 347). This is the epitome of the key term, “Illusory Truth Effect”. Most people are glad to just follow along without a deep interpretation of what is really happening, since under the surface is the existence of the additional key term, “Weaponizing Uncertainty.” This term, developed by Brene’ Brown, utilizes the fear of the American people to just go along with whatever he emphatically states.

Robert Joseph Dole, senate leader, was quoted in the 1996 presidential campaign as stating, “Don’t watch television. You make up your own mind. Don’t let them make up your mind for you” (West 104). This shows the cognizance Dole has of the power we know the media has on its audience when we take a step back. The paradox to this is the

fact that none of us would be as well informed as we are to the facts in the world today if it were not for the media. Dole's words have not had any significant impact on his audience since the dose of reality is too jarring in our already challenging world.

The thesis presents the consistency of audiences seemingly wanting to be lied to. The potential of work needing to be put into a thorough analysis of what is really going on behind all these literal scenes would amount to another thesis on that topic alone! Our job is to ascertain our own truth from what we hear, realizing that there is a lot of myth to what we hear.

Everything we hear via the media, or even in our daily lives, should always be taken at face value. If we don't get this at first, time will teach us lessons from which we develop the wisdom to hopefully learn not to believe everything we hear. This is summarized in the sentence, "The identification of masks being worn in leadership will help finalize this goal" (Combe & Boyle 13, 157). We as a responsible audience need to listen with a discerning ear. We still cannot avoid the influence it's had over us within the world of politics especially through the power of its' actors.

When Trump became president, *The Apprentice* needed a new leading actor. *The Apprentice* brought in Arnold Schwarzenegger. He also comes from an acting background that transitioned into politics. As opposed to Trump, he had a very modest childhood. Through his own determination and perseverance, he was able to become a favorite of the public eye.

This puts into effect the key term "Parasocial Bond" as the perfect description yet again. Schwarzenegger was able to connect to his audience due to his multiple characters he's portrayed along with his body building competitions. He was a perfect example of a

hard-working immigrant coming to America to which many Americans can relate to. His physical strength also gives him the effect of “Green Lanternism.”

The strength behind the candidate’s words, along with strength such as Schwarzenegger’s obvious physical fitness, combined with his acting career proves to be very convincing to the public. When *The Apprentice* wasn’t going very well with ratings, even though Schwarzenegger loved the whole crew and seemed to replace Trump well, Trump blamed the ratings’ decline on Schwarzenegger doing a bad job. This resulted in retaliation of Schwarzenegger stating there was “baggage” from Trump’s still being involved (Johnson).

Trump’s continued involvement was a surprise to the crew as well, especially since Trump was now president. The question arises of how there is any spare time to do the show. Trump obviously neglected running the country. This article leads to the idea of a firestorm of two powerhouses, utilizing their acting background, having a negative effect as if scientifically canceling each other out!

The statement, “For the ceremonial jobs only a president can perform, we expect behavior consistent with the scope of their duties.... [Donald Trump] ...is not acting presidential,” supports the discussion on the need for professionalism being more of a focus in politics, not drama (Dickerson 65). If there were more of a presentation of professionalism, there would be no room for any type of drama.

Schwarzenegger is compared to former wrestler and former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura (James George Janos) in a more compatible way. The scholarly article by A. Freya Thimsen that set this analogy up utilized a platform of their physical strength. This article stated, “Ventura’s performance as a professional wrestler thoroughly

prepared his constituency to accept ongoing reconstitutions of his personal” (Thimsen 4). This was ironically the issue that is a challenge of the thesis which is the focus on the glamor and appearance and not the content of what is being stated by politicians.

The thesis planned on going down this path of political commentary of these two candidates much more aggressively, but Ventura didn’t have as comparable an amount of information on him in a scholarly context. Trump had so much more various information available that the thesis is able to utilize his behavior as an example for many key terms especially more so in differentiation from Schwarzenegger. The comparison between Trump and Schwarzenegger helped provide similarities between these two leaders as well as great contrasts.

Schwarzenegger was lacking in political acumen; his quick transition from acting into politics seemed to magnify his lack of qualifications he had in any kind of political activity. “Schwarzenegger has not been part of government in any sense. While to many of his supporters, who fall into the long American tradition that supports rotation in office as an unmitigated good, this may be a virtue, in practice it will create challenges—for him, for his staff, for the career civil servants on whom they depend on and for the legislators and constituent groups with whom they interact” (Capell 1). This was not only a letdown to himself but many of his voters that were counting on him for a greater change. The saving factor was the fact of his undeniable presence of strength. This is where the term “macho” presents itself as well as in much research in regard to many leaders.

The power of the “macho” leader connects back through many former political leaders. This was a gauge by which the American people would be more forgiving and

accepting of their political leader's faults. This supports the argument that a candidate may not be truly qualified. The public is convinced that they would make a good politician due to their fame and popularity and being considered "macho", as in the "Parasocial Bond." This term "macho" comes up consistently when research is done on the preference of leader types. John Orman's book, *Comparing Presidential Behavior: Carter, Reagan, and The Macho Presidential Style*, states that former President James Earl Carter, Jr. was unfairly criticized for not living up to the "macho" stereotype which presidents usually reflect.

The fact that the word "macho" is even in the title of this book reflects what seems to be what Americans want. With today's more educated reader, even if due to the fact of simple search engines, it is surprising that this simple word "macho" is utilized in the most intellectual writings. This term "macho" is also why Reagan was exemplary in this area due to being able to control his emotions while speaking about sensitive topics. His audience easily forgot any of his leadership mistakes due to his familiarity and strength, relaying back once again to the "Parasocial Bond." Reagan read and utilized Orman's book; this was disappointing to learn. Orman speaks about documents called the Public Papers that list formal meetings and participants for these presidents.

These show that Carter met more than half the time with fewer people, mainly the same 3 people, where Reagan was more engaged in political activities. This is a further example of what the lack of finesse can bring to a powerful positioned political figure who lacks theatrical training and the understanding of showmanship. The book exemplifies the fact that Carter didn't have the opportunity to hone his skills for public presentation as did Reagan, who came from an acting background.

The analysis with Reagan also brought in President Carter for an analogy but in a negative point of view. There was also not much information in the book on Carter, so it left the thesis needing more as if a cliff hanger with so many more questions to resolve. Schwarzenegger was mentioned as an epitome of strength in this book. He was an obvious preference of topic for the author.

Reagan related to his audience consistently through one of his movie's characters, "The Gipper" (Reagan 53). Previously, before acting and his presidency he was fondly known as "Dutch" (Reagan 15). He related to the audience through his tough guy movie character. While being president he knew the power of his presentation style. "Reagan believed in controlling the media like television and radio broadcasts where he would have script control" (Orman 115). This is the "Parasocial Bond" at work.

Orman's book also quotes from Richard Neustadt's, an American Political scientist's, analysis of the presidency. Neustadt states, "The president, presidential candidates, and near presidents can never be sensitive to gay rights. This would suggest that the president himself might be "queer" or "pansy" (Orman 15). This is an appalling statement not to only share but to even have in mind.

The fact that presidents are even being cued to hone their acting tools in this way shows where so many political problems stem from. Professionally trained actors can provide the appearance of strength even while addressing delicate issues. Even Reagan, "Was this skinny twenty-six-year-old year-old kid from Iowa really worthy of being in the company of such legends." (Reagan 45). His small stature as a child may be the reason for his need to consistently show strength as an adult.

Bringing in Trump on this topic, he felt it necessary to have it stated in the book, *The Art of The Deal*, that his lawyer Roy Cohn, who was gay, felt that “to the average person, being gay was almost synonymous with being a wimp” (Trump 100).

The component of the research which instills a president to be more masculine was the ability to move quickly in regard to any emergency.

The definition “First Responder” is in relation to how the president must act quickly when there is a crisis. The public needs their leaders to portray efficient expediency even if it is just a facade. This was introduced in *Hardest Job in The World; The American Presidency* by John Dickerson.

In this book, it’s also stated that this is why “bank architecture relied so heavily on imposing granite facades and pillars to project an aura of stability and permanence in front of the fragility of finance” (Dickerson 98). This is why banks were also sometimes called “trusts” (Bernake, Paulson and Geithner 15). There is also a chapter in Dickerson’s book with this title of First Responder. This shows the importance of how well a politician quickly responds to a crisis in the public eye, showing strength.

The former training of an actor can truly influence cognizance of the president’s self-awareness which allows him to innately respond quickly and appropriately to a crisis. This is primarily due to his thorough understanding of self. The actor already having experienced different situational upsets, even if only through previous characters they have portrayed for theatrics, establishes a solid base of initial reaction. Chapter 7 of Dickerson’s book quotes former President Thomas Woodrow Wilson as saying, “Life does not consist in thinking, it consists of acting” (Dickerson 75). This is also reflected in the reactionary time since the trained actor is also self-aware of how poorly a slow

reaction time can reflect during a crisis. During any crisis the public is hyper focused on a leader's reactions.

This helps a former actor turned politician at least appear to have a strong facade. General James Norman Mattis insisted on not having updates on wounded soldiers during each battle. He was afraid it would slow him down. He wanted to, "stay focused on the enemy and keeping the men alive who are still in the fight" (Dickerson 248). In Dickerson's book there is also another section titled, "I Cannot Go Any Faster." This reflects the views of former president President Abraham Lincoln and former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt regarding the limitations of their powers. This is in relation to the American people's views instilling public peer pressure and how it ironically slows down the reaction time of the first responders due to the panic instilled from it. These two presidents were not of the level of celebrity before holding office and their wisdom has led to their realization that, "Wise presidents discover they are not directors but facilitators of events" (Dickerson 303).

When you are under the spell of the "Parasocial Bond" then the audience doesn't need to think or judge, they just trust in the efficacy of the leader's actions. This, in conjunction with rapid reactions, doesn't even allow the audience time to think or have a chance to guess, none -the-less second guess the leader's actions. This also is in a contrast to Trump's ruling style of his way or no way, while it contradicts Obama's well thought out speeches where he bows to the public eye but is quick to react behind the scenes. Trump on the other hand seems to have a temper tantrum when he doesn't get his way where the audience is in a state of distraction subliminally absorbing the shocking behavior as if they were watching a TV show.

This term of “macho” also comes up again in regard to former President George H. W. Bush. He was a bomber pilot in World War II who had to parachute from his plane and became a very successful American spymaster. This along with his being the director of the CIA, he still appeared on the cover of October 18, 1987, Newsweek magazine with the by-line of “George Bush: Fighting the ‘Wimp Factor’” (Dickerson 317). The simplicity of these terms leads to an inferior opinion of Bush which is disrespectful of his being a veteran and leader. During his 1980 party nomination he was also bowled over by Ronald Reagan.

Reagan was funding the debate and when additional candidates unexpectedly showed up, Bush was scrambling to utilize the rules for it being a two man debate, to which Reagan replied, “I am paying for this microphone....” (Dickerson 316). The crowd, already enamored with the former actor, ate it up. There is a mentality of being scrappy and this sadly does seem to consistently win over the general public. The public is more focused on the glamor than the whole story.

Even though Bush realized that during this debate he chose to have, “accepted the rules, and I’d given my word and I was going to keep it” (Meacham 232). Looking back, he realized he should have met with Reagan and the other four debaters to clarify that it was not his rules but the newspaper’s rules to stick with the original plan regarding the number of debaters. The integrity with which Bush handled the situation was diminished by the performance of Reagan. Bush had a sang-froid way of presentation even during the most heated debates and this puts the key term “Green Lanternism” to work against him via his lack of believability even in his earnest style.

This event was ironically a catalyst for Bush to turn to theatrics. He hired a media guru, Roger Eugene Ailes, to stage outbursts against reporters along with Daniel Irvin Rather, Jr. at another event. His turning to choreographed performances led him to utilize acting to his advantage in the world of politics. The Meacham book, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*, further helps to understand Bush's childhood and life before presidency. His being analyzed by a former teacher resulted in Bush being labeled as, "Ambitious and self-confident but perhaps not self-assertive enough" (Meacham 35).

In May of 1989 Bush was again challenged with his presentation style not being considered strong or dramatic enough when he requested that the Berlin Wall be eradicated. He stated that it, "stands as a monument to the failure of communism. It must come down" (Meacham 378). Even internally in the House, the Majority Leader, Richard Andrew Gephardt stated that Bush was, "inadequate to the moment" (Meacham 382). Reagan, 6 months later also addressed concerns of the wall intimating the great divide between West and East. He emphatically stated, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" (Meacham 377)! This is the moment most recounted historically.

The unknown reason for Bush's calm address of the Wall is a little known request from Gorbachev, "urging that we not overreact," in regard to the Wall (Meacham 380). The concern was that there would be a violent response from East Germany. Pure sensationalism was still the preferred method to attain approval of Americans where these spectators suffer little consequence.

To appear stronger, since he was becoming more and more aware of the American people's power of their perspective, Bush chose to socialize with Arnold

Schwarzenegger. He called Bush “Conan the Republican” (West & Orman 69). Bush appointed Schwarzenegger as Chairman of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Bush’s consultants felt this helped his macho image.

This was a way for Bush to delve into the theatrical realm of putting forward the appearance of being more “macho.” This power seems to become necessary to be deemed a successful leader. Schwarzenegger was a superhero, and this allowed for him to be almost a Captain America where anyone that stood by him would be deemed stronger. Obama was quoted as saying, “Voters would like presidents to be Superman, but the best they can do is strike that pose” (Meacham 77).

The Bush family felt, “Théâtre was a popular family pastime: S.P. Bush took his sons to shows in New York” (Meacham 10). What seems to be left by the wayside during this vicissitude of theater being enjoyed to being a standard of judgment is a sense of nobility and honor. A disadvantage of using Dickerson’s book is the fact that it was published in 2020 so there is not much retort towards the author’s writings yet.

The thesis shows us here that even without formal training or any experience in the world of acting, it is never too late to hone the craft into a tool. It seems to be a very effective to become yet another one of the audience’s favorite actors, even if it translates into also becoming belligerent. When Obama was surprised by an impressive performance by Mitt Romney after a primary debate, Obama was analyzed as becoming aggressive and confident along with other “mach” terms that were considered more masculine in response to his competition’s success.

Obama then, “brought more vitality to his campaign stops.... Additionally, Obama injected more criticism of Romney’s character.....The attacks also contributed to

more masculine depictions of the president, as going on the offensive does” (Conroy 129). Neither Obama nor Romney had any background in acting. Obama performs as a natural with utilization of the “Green Lanternism” theory. His convictions do seem to be true to heart. Obama does have a sincerity that shines through his carefully chosen words.

The December 24, 2011 “New York Times” states that the opinion of classmates and professors at Harvard where he attained his Business Degree concluded that, “Mr. Romney embraced an analytical, nonideological way of thinking...” (Kantor). When he ran as a presidential candidate as a Republican, decades after graduating, he has been accused of, “having no core convictions, a once-moderate governor suspected of tailoring his views for political expediency” (Kantor).

These statements support a view of the thesis where there is a lack of conviction in statements from Romney. The “Green Lanternism” theory is utilized to describe Romney from this perspective in a negative light where his need to be successful comes first even when important topics are brought to his attention needing his resolve. He is lacking in a true conviction, and this portrays him in a disingenuous light.

Reagan utilized Peter Barton Wilson, a former governor of California, who was also supported by Schwarzenegger to make himself appear stronger. This reflects the reality of how one presents themselves, poses as one of the more important aspects of how utilizing the world of theater can make someone a successful politician, even without an actor’s background.

Schwarzenegger being looked upon as a superhero especially after playing the Terminator in a series of *Terminator* movies brings a sense of comfort to audiences even

when he plays himself in real life. The effect of this caricature is connected to the key term “Parasocial Bond”. The audience considers Schwarzenegger a relatable character such as Captain America. They have the same effect due to a strong familial connection, even if it is with a person who is not real or a character!

Schwarzenegger represents an example of ideal masculinity. Even with this he was still impressed with other very masculine men. Schwarzenegger himself, even considered a superhero, pays the view forward towards another actor he considers impressive. When he met Jesse Ventura as an actor auditioning for a part, before becoming the 38th governor of Minnesota, Schwarzenegger stated that he felt Ventura was, “very manly” (Schwarzenegger 338). His book also states, “I’d always felt we lacked real men in movies, and to me Jesse was the real deal” (Schwarzenegger 338). The fact that Ventura eventually also became successful in politics is another nod to the effective presentation actors can afford themselves.

The thesis purports an idea of any human needing a focus of a symbolic idol. This presents hope which when compared with reality can only exist through an ideal character, who in the real world, could not possibly exist, since we are all only human. This fact of how well actors seem to draw their viewers into a “Parasocial Bond” can also be utilized in a positive way. This is exemplified by Robert Sargent Shriver Jr., Schwarzenegger’s eventual father-in-law. He questioned whether Schwarzenegger was really making any difference in the world simply by being famous.

Shriver personally felt the entertainment industry was a waste of time. Shriver stated, “How many people do you save when you look good on the set” (Schwarzenegger 375). Schwarzenegger did agree and this fueled him to become even more involved in

making the world a better place. Even though Sarge's wife, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, was also heavily involved in numerous causes without being in the limelight, she did see the utility of Schwarzenegger's fame. She eventually wrote a letter to President Bush in regard to Schwarzenegger being considered for the fitness council in which she called him, "the number one star," to be considered for the role. This elicited a response from Bush of gratefulness for, "recommending our man Conan" (Schwarzenegger 377).

The face of the "Parasocial Bond" up close is still seen as a power that only fame could hold. The utilization of this power with cognizance of the responsibility can be used for improving even the world. All the people involved in advising Schwarzenegger play cogs in this wheel that are pushing toward the ideal of his being a real-life superhero.

The people that were closest to him at this time in his life seem to still be subjected to a "Parasocial Bond" with the personalities that Schwarzenegger previously portrayed. This may have been the catalyst for Schwarzenegger's launch into more challenging goals.

In opposition to this view of Schwarzenegger being a superhero, Bush, a war hero in real life and being supported by Reagan, was considered a, "chlappen or dishrag," in Austria, Schwarzenegger's home country (Schwarzenegger 367). This being reflected in America caused him to lose beginning primaries to Bob Dole. Bush was considered "Reagan's shadow" (Schwarzenegger 367).

Schwarzenegger was eventually hired on to the Republican team in which he was to add "celebrity power" (Schwarzenegger 368). It is amazing how this power is utilized as a secret weapon for those closest to Schwarzenegger. The fact that it is a concept of a

character portrayed by the actor almost presents as a running joke. The punchline would be seemingly on the actor, but the fact that this actor handles his power with a base of reality due to his humble upbringing, negates the effect of being the brunt of the joke. It instead results in him being able to laugh at himself being such a character in the first place.

This is where true healthy power comes into play. Schwarzenegger himself realized that “Humor was what made me stand out from the other action leads” (Schwarzenegger 338). This break from the drama gave Schwarzenegger a more realistic appearance as if a guy you could relate to. His moving into politics proved to be his favorite decision in his life since he really felt as if he was helping people. His success in both careers may be due to his mindset of, “No matter what you do in life, you have to sell it” (Netflix).

Richard Nixon once invited Schwarzenegger to the White House. Even though Schwarzenegger knew of his unpopularity with Americans, he still was able to appreciate Nixon’s rebellion. The topic of this meeting fed into Schwarzenegger’s quest for constant challenges. Nixon was the one that initially encouraged Schwarzenegger to run for governor of California. Nixon stated that, “I’ll help you all the way” (Schwarzenegger 405). This was a shock to Schwarzenegger who never considered this at all before Nixon. Even Nixon looked at Schwarzenegger as a superhero.

Acting has also benefited Nixon before he became president. Nixon started to warm up to acting early on when he initially met his wife during rehearsal in a community play. As a candidate for vice president, he was encouraged by former President Dwight David “Ike” Eisenhower to go public via the media in response to an

accusation from the “New York Post”. This was in regard to California businessmen setting up a slush fund for him. The famous *Checkers Speech* bailed Nixon out after the problem wouldn’t go away with his initial anger. With his wife seated next to him he soulfully stated in front of the media that this was “wrong, just not illegal” (West & Orman 44).

In the book, *Celebrity Politics: Real in America*, showed that honing the acting skill here was the best way to deliver difficult news to the American public. News delivered this way with an air of honesty as a caring father which was eaten up by the audience. The bond was made from the familiarity Nixon had due to his story where he leveled with the American public. This put the “Parasocial Bond” to work.

This utilization of the media led to such a huge welling of support that Nixon eventually became vice president. This speech was truthful, but still Nixon learned that the truth can only be delivered with an air of gentility, softness and humor while being masculine so it will only then be readily received by viewers. This experience was a first time lesson where actors are trained to picture the cause and effect before they play their roles.

When Nixon eventually became president, his continued utilization of the media became even more pronounced. “Nixon hired more media and image consultants than any of his predecessors” (Ellis 119) while still insisting he didn’t worry about his image. Richard J. Ellis, who wrote *The Development of the American Presidency*, focused on the seemingly now more consistent theme through the writing of a politician’s image becoming more important than even in telling a simple truth.

During the infamous John Fitzgerald Kennedy - Nixon debate, Nixon was ill, and this ended up distracting the audience from the important matters at hand. It was stated that, “the Kennedy-Nixon debate is one of ‘three key episodes contributing to the general telemythology’ (sic). The other two episodes are ‘Television’s graphic portrayal of the war in Vietnam [and] the unprecedented popularity of President Ronald Reagan.’” (Krauss 127).

Nixon quoted James MacGregor Burns in his book “The Real War”. He stated, “Presidents must have a will to power, or they will not be successful presidents. They must constantly search for power, building it, if necessary, out of every scrap of formal authority and personal influence they can locate. They must constantly guard whatever power they have achieved. They must hoard power so that it will be available in the future” (Nixon 248).

This shows the acknowledgment Nixon found for the necessity of being an actor to become successful in the world of politics. Nixon’s book shows his ironic weakness of a lust for power and the realization of acting strong to get it. His portrayal of openness with the American public led to a stronger “Parasocial Bond”.

In the book “Bloody Crossroads 2020” it is stated in the context of Nixon that, “...conservative energy of the macho underground river still flourished in the corners of Hollywood” (Goldberg 34-35). Nixon frequently played the movie Patton in the White House, which is something Trump also did, and Trump stated it was one of his favorite movies.

This movie showed how Patton had gone too far and portrayed him as a killer. Goldberg shows us that is where acting has also gone to the point of too far where bloody

wars are inspirational for leaders that are internally weak. This irony is that the quest to be more masculine or “macho” becomes a weakness through an obsessive focus.

Chapter III

Actors' Unfavorable Encounters With Politics

“I do not believe that artists or actors and people should be out there like voicing their full-blown opinions on politics because, let’s face it, at the end of the day, I’m not that smart of a guy.”

—Kid Rock (Robert James Ritchie)

The person Schwarzenegger admired most was Clint Eastwood. He was enamored with the way Eastwood handled money and politics. Schwarzenegger stated he wanted to be like Eastwood when was “looking for the next challenge” once acting wasn’t enough that he then went into politics (Schwarzenegger, Arnold and Peter Petre 403). This being Schwarzenegger’s view triggers the question of was it really the need for a challenge or was it Eastwood feeling the loss of the limelight?

The moral compass of those we look up to for examples, such as these leaders, or even with former actors turned politicians, such as Eastwood, can turn to a lower standard. When they are put under pressure, possibly in fear of appearing weak, they turn towards a familiar character. This is presented in an example of the article by Mark L. Jones, “Beyond Punks in Empty Chairs: An Imaginary Conversation with Clint Eastwood’s Dirty Harry - Toward Peace Through Spiritual Justice” (Jones 312).

This article addresses how Eastwood turned into his former character, Dirty Harry, during a Republican convention. He ended up showing aggression to the point of getting his audience to say, “Make my day” when pretending to have a conversation in disdain with President Obama (CNN Politics video 2010). It was easier for the actor to

turn to what has been rehearsed before and had proven success when in an uncomfortable or unfamiliar position.

After doing further research on why Eastwood got into politics from acting the thesis determines, “The mayoral adventure began because of ice cream cones....” (Eliot 221). Eastwood had been challenged by his hometown Carmel-by-the-Sea rules. It was construction challenge when the town passed an ordinance on storefront ice cream cone sales. The town deemed “undignified” (Eliot 221) which then a seed was planted by Eastwood’s friends for his consideration of running for Mayor to make some changes. Here is an example of a weak catalyst for a “macho” character getting into politics to get things done. The fact of self-preservation is the real motive, not a true calling to serve the people.

The most recent scandal involving an actor becoming aggressive at an inappropriate event is actor Will Smith (Willard Carroll Smith, II) slapping the commentator and comedian, Chris Rock (Christopher Julius Rock), during the Screen Actors Guild Awards. This is the same situation of a well-respected actor becoming aggressive under duress and then being observed in a totally different light.

This presents the idea of the actor’s past experiences being brought up in a difficult situation. Then, the utilization of acting and its dramatics come into play during real life situations that would have been handled in a more controlled, stronger manner, with a calm disposition. Acting seems to allow the actor to slip into their aggressive mode as if portraying an aggressive character and still have this aggression readily accepted by the admiring audience.

Rock Hudson is the exemplification of how a very dominant actor can be gay and yet have an undeniable masculine, attention getting presence. Hudson was the basis of an upheaval as well when he announced he had HIV-AIDS. His strong masculinity gave his audience a different view of the gay man. This was the first time there was a different perspective on something not well understood in the first place.

Marlon Brando, in contrast, brought in his own theatrics to politics during the 1973 Oscars where he rejected his award for best actor. Brando had a underprivileged start in life and was not allowed into the war draft due to “an injured knee and poor eyesight” (Krauss 127). Brando exemplifies the idea of a dominant male which proves to be very powerful to any audience.

His rejection of his award for best actor was discussed in the book *Hollywood and Politics; A Sourcebook*. This Oscar was, “for best actor for his role in *The Godfather (1972)*” (Critchlow and Raymond 213). Another actor, unbeknown at the time, portrayed herself as Sacheen Little Feather, an Apache American during the awards ceremony. She refused this award on his behalf because of the way Native Americans were being treated.

This was looked at in two different ways by his fellow members which was with malice and approval. Brando’s fame brought him respect. The notoriety it afforded him in this political format was looked on as being used in a disrespectful way toward the actor’s academy award. This also could be portrayed as passing off his concerns to another person, considered by viewers to be a lesser dominant gender and nationality, and hence weak on his part.

Cynthia Ellen Nixon, former TV star playing Miranda Hobbes on *Sex in the City*, ran for Governor of New York in 2018. According to one of her campaign advisers, L. Joy Williams, Nixon lost to Andrew Mark Cuomo due to her, “only being an actress and only being a celebrity” (McKinley). Even though she supported important causes, her being an actress diminished this due to her previous career.

In an analogy to Trump who was considered laughable as a political candidate, and still being elected as president of the United States, possibly the real objection for voters was Nixon’s being a lesbian. The thesis having covered male actors who have had the most goading experiences with politics seemed to be those that were not considered strong enough or gay. There being no male counterpart in Nixon’s marital relationship may have pervaded her political realm as well.

Ashley Judd (Ashley Tyler Ciminella), is an actress appearing in many top movies. She is the daughter of late Country music singer Naomi Judd (Diana Ellen Judd), and half-sister of another Country music singer Wynonna Ellen Judd. The actress planned to run for U.S. Senate in 2013. She liked to focus on the “human in humanitarian” and is a “social justice feminist” (Judd); her campaign never took off.

The reason behind her failed campaign was thought to be her leftist views. When she spoke about her life, she was adamant about acting being left out; she considered this a disadvantage. Her ending the idea of being Senator started with the public’s discovery of her personal challenges, such as “depression” (Anagnoson). This was unfortunately considered fallible to the public eye, making the humanistic actress appear weak, and not a viable candidate.

Celebrity Politics

The term celebrity politics was used by A. Freya Thimsen in the *Velvet Light Trap* article as well as in the book “Celebrity Politics” by Darrell M. West and John Orman. In the article it was analyzed if a good democratic result could be deemed from celebrity politics. There is a section in this book that covers the famous political scandals and also celebrity activism which covers what world changing events actors have been involved in. There really should not be any variant labeling in politics; it is either political or not.

The flip side of Thimsen’s article should be used to be a base of analysis from the point of view of politics. As politics stands alone it should be hopefully treated with respect by any former celebrity who chooses to delve into it. Activism in West and Orman’s book should also be the focus of its causes, not the actors that are behind them. These celebrities themselves do not need the fame for choosing these causes to focus on. The frustrating aspect is the fact that for numerous causes, attention is only brought to the topic because of the famous actor behind them.

The best way to try to separate the celebrity from politics is through the utilization of an example that is not human at all. The caricature of Captain America was able to amalgamate his perfection as a superhero with his humanistic concerns of being a leader when his character had to face the challenges of being a presidential candidate. This is an ideal version of “Green Lanternism”.

Captain America’s decision was explained in his following words, which summarized the American stance at the time, “The presidency is one of the most important jobs in the world. The holder of that office must represent the best interests of an entire

nation. He must be ready to negotiate -to compromise-24 hours a day. To preserve the republic at all costs! I understand this... I appreciate this... and I realized I need to work within such a framework - by the same token-I have worked in front all my life for the growth and advancement of the American Dream. And I believe that my duty to the DREAM would severely limit any abilities I might have to preserve the reality. We all live in the real world... And sometimes the world can be pretty grim. But it is the dream... The whole point... That makes the reality worth living. In the early 1940s, I made a personal pledge to uphold the dream... And if the dream remains even partially unfulfilled, I cannot abandon it! And so, I hope you can understand-that I cannot in all fairness be your candidate! You need to look within yourself to find the people you need to keep this nation strong and, God willing, to make a dream come true!” (Stevens 153-154)

The above statement is the epitome of what would be an ideal retort to a requested explanation of a candidate’s refusal for presidency. There is a norm that Americans have come to know if not through knowledge, then through instinct. This is the same reasoning that allows voters to become enamored with leaders who do not have a solid reasoning but somehow are able to connect with people through their convincingly strong presentation.

The familiarity we project onto the actor in real life scenarios, such as when they enter politics, becomes our reality. The analysis of the actor during their roles, “Is seen engaged with others; but often he faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, talks as if he were conversing personally and privately” (Horton and Wohl 215). Viewers are subliminally fooled into thinking that the actor’s stories are real and so the audience themselves can relate.

A Politician Who Went Into Acting

Fred Thompson was a federal prosecutor who was part of the counsel on the committee that revealed the White House recording system for Watergate. He then fell into acting due to a case that was turned into a book and ended up playing himself when it was turned into a film. He frequented the TV show *Law & Order*; his version of a “Parasocial Bond” made him an American icon. After spending eight years in the U.S. Senate, he joked that this, “made me long for the realism and sincerity of Hollywood” (Thompson 5). His words to his mother who wished for him not to be involved in law or politics was stating that, “If it’s any consolation, I didn’t turn out to be much of a politician after all” (Thompson 13). After a break from politics and getting back into acting he stated, “Having been in law and politics, some might say, I’d never left it” (Thompson 208).

Thompson was such a relatable character that he was one of the only actors that was identified as playing themselves on film. It is this easy, down to earth, presence that is refreshing and a continued to make him stand out as a unique character not only because of his getting into acting from politics but also due to his authenticity. This rare combination is the only example that could be found. He also did not fit into any of the aforementioned definitions which is refreshing and hope inspiring that there would be more molds broken in the future, hopefully starting with labeling.

Research Limitations

The question of whether and how an actor’s backgrounds relates to their performance in politics is not a well-researched topic. There was no direct material on this topic in any research so far. It is exciting to be a pioneer on this topic, but the thesis

will tread carefully since any findings on this new subject will be an invitation to many criticisms because of the uncharted territory. In analysis of Reagan or Trump the thesis was able to gather sufficient scholarly information. The largest amount of information available on other leaders was mainly available through comparisons.

Trump and Reagan were the two presidents that had the most information on them. The paradox between these two was that Trump was held in more of a negative light.

Chapter IV

Utilizing Acting to Survive

“What does an actor know about politics?”

—Ronald Reagan

Zelenskyy

The one aspect that has not been covered in any of these analyses is that of any political figure who is under duress. Quite often this is the situation for our leaders, but the utilization of an acting background may actually help them to fake it till they make it. An example of this is the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Oleksandrovyh Zelenskyy, and the current times of his country being under attack.

He comes from an acting/comedian background. An excerpt from a February 26, 2022, *Economist* article had this to share, “Whereas his predecessor, Petro Oleksiyovych Poroshenko, an oligarch, donned military uniform and campaigned on the slogan of ‘Language, army, faith’, Mr. Zelensky recorded videos with a clown’s red nose. ‘I challenged...our elites’ [politicians]. They called me a clown. I am a clown, and I am very proud of it.’ But his message was serious: they were fooling people.” He was being honest.

As with Trump’s view of politics being an extension of business, so was this the same view of Ukraine’s former leader as well as its nemesis, Russia’s leader. Since Zelenskyy was an actor turned president, he was able to use his acting to get him through this horrendous experience.

In the same *Economist* article, it was also stated that, "... he has been saved by his gift as an actor. His ability to respond to the audience is precisely what has enabled him to embody the role of a real national leader in a time of war. He can mirror and project people's fears, desires, and dreams. Ukraine has come together after the invasion. He is as much inspired by the spirit of his people as he inspires them." This is the most effective use of the "Parasocial Bond" to date.

This brave leader is terrified; the definition of bravery is being afraid but persevering through. An interview with Barry Tomalin, London "International House" consultant and teaching director, as well as the author of the book "World's Business Cultures: And How to Unlock Them" has a quote of, "Joke carefully with foreign nationals" (Repsiene 9-28).

This solidifies the fact of how unique Zelenskyy is. His bravery started long ago with his unique use of humor to expose politics. This same bravery inspired him to act bravely for his followers. This is what anyone brave would need to continue through an impossible situation. This is the best usage of an acting background in politics yet.

Chapter V

History of Theatrics in Politics

“I became active in politics because I saw the possibility, if we all sat back and did nothing, of a world in which there would no longer be any stages for actors to act on.”

—Helen Gahagan

The act of staging events started long ago in the world of politics. The 1925 Scopes Trial is one of the first legal battles over teaching evolution in public schools which involved a drama set up by a few members of Dayton, Tennessee where the economy was in “dire straits” (Shapiro 8). The trial brought in huge amounts of publicity which did help boost the town’s economy at least for a little while. Political opportunities are considered the reason why social movements are successful or if they become failures. Exercising power is a way to get political reform to “affect the ability of the state to encourage political movement” (Lienesch 116).

This section of the thesis demonstrates how important it is to have a believable leader at the helm. This is where it seems to lead us to the point of the success former actors have as political leaders. The sad sacrifice is that these momentous performances are mostly based on lies. The visceral level of survival is the catalyst which is never an ideal scenario for having the best result for all in the end, especially the performer.

In the Scopes Trial, even though it was under false pretenses, Scopes himself still got into trouble by incurring jail time and a fine. It was stated that, “One of the reasons

the Scopes trial was so significant was precisely because it was a good show” (Lienesch 141). This is the epitome of the key term Moral Flattening. The fact that the whole trial was a fraud concocted in the hopes of bringing in tourism to boost the economy is not even a well-known aspect. The inclusion of the key term “Parasocial Bond” brings more focus on the famous attorneys involved leading to the Moral Flattening.

Even before the Scopes Trial was the “Texas Tornado,” in 1922 (Pratt 105). The fiery John Franklyn Norris was a Fundamentalist Pastor for 43 years starting in 1909. He fought against the teachings of fundamentalism. His nemesis, Benjamin Marcus Bogard, an Arkansas Landmark Baptist Pastor, utilized humor in the creation of the word “Funnymentalism” (Pratt 105). This was in the hopes of obtaining favorable attention from the public towards the dangers of Fundamentalist Baptists regarding the Landmark cause.

This utilization of creativity even starting at the time of documented political disputes has been a tool for those who are not even trained actors. Humor is also a show of strength since this is a skill that is especially hard to display during tumult. This comfort given via humor developed a “Parasocial Bond” to Bogard’s piers. Those who recognize the need for these tools turned weapons with the addition of humor are the most creative of all and to be most respected.

Conclusion

The result of analyzing theatrics being involved in politics was enlightening since there was never much thought of any staged scenes in such a serious forum. The reality is that if these theatrics were not discovered until well after the desired result was achieved then a success was accomplished due to the staged event. These successes make the need for theatrics seem legitimate. As artificial as this seems in such a serious realm, it is still proven effective hence necessary to success. The competitors may have more of a clear conscience due to the art of acting not being considered a typical political lie.

The thesis had a goal of laying the foundation for a decision regarding acting and the tools that come into play with it being enough preparation for the actor that has chosen to get into politics. As for the example of the one politician who went into acting, his years of political practice did also seem to ready him for a career in acting. This result shows that any career you choose will always take time to master. If you invest your heart into it along the line of the “Green Lanternism” theory, then those witnessing your result will celebrate with you on your success when you have given it your all no matter what the outcome or how it was achieved.

When I first started writing this thesis, I was sure that there was no way an actor should ever become a politician. Only until months in have I decided that not only is acting a tool that can help hone anyone’s skills to be a better presenter or even a more comfortable conversationalist. It seems to take away the distraction of presentation overall and allow the former actor to focus on the most important job they will ever do, making the world a better place, through politics. The acting background also affords the

actor a level of fame as we previously analyzed that brings them more power with the conflation of careers. This results in a much more powerful form of persuasion.

Those who have been in politics all along also had a learning curve but just at an earlier juncture. Actors entering this new career at a later age will have their personal challenges with the transition more publicly recognized since their fame brings them under a microscope. This incorrectly labels them as not being cut out for the job. Time will always be needed for any career change.

It is the viewers' perspective that allows judgment to be made where it is human nature to have what we observe to usually be in a negative light. Actors are at least accustomed to this level of harsh judgment, and this alone puts them ahead due to familiarity, with a more readily available focus on more important matters at hand.

The most formidable discovery is when I sat back and did an analogy of all these actors turned politician. There is a consistency of confidence resulting from doing the right thing; this again nods to the "Green Lanternism" Theory. The fact that there is a whole slew of words created to do this exacting analysis proves the importance of the conviction with which goals are pursued and then statements are presented. Trump presents himself in a removed manner, but he still is convincing because of his confidence even if this quality is based on disillusionment. Even he is lying to himself, which results in a style of leadership to the point where citizens will be at a detriment as our country suffers.

Disappointment follows this discovery since there is a sanctity of the acting realm that should never have been tarnished by the dirty business side of politics. Such as discovered in the section on Celebrity Politics above, there should ideally be a separation

of these two worlds. Otherwise, the actor might eventually be widely considered a liar when off his performance platform.

The ideal would be to create a third category of the acting politician where there is a cognizance of the creative politician being one who uses the political realm as their stage. The politician would still have a goal of solving governmental issues, but with possibly more palatable manners and verbiage, and when needed, a floridity. The idea of a third category may seem farcical, but a similar combination was done with a new party that wasn't labeled Democrat or Republican during recent elections. Having a non-label would allow for the appropriate focus to be on the most important matter at hand, being citizen's needs.

In the meantime, even the cartoon character Captain America must bow to the world's ways. The world would sleep better at night if it considered lying politicians to be acting where lying itself would not be so easily accepted. There is a steadfast norm to have the truth accepted to which we must all abide to fit in even if it is encapsulated in a lie. When there is a need for discernment of a political success then the creative politician will be the winner in the end due to their lies simply being considered clever theatrics.

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