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THE GODFATHER OF MODERN POLITICAL CONSULTING: MATTHEW REESE

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

In
History

by
Ethan Thomas Tackett

Approved by
Dr. Kat Williams, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Kevin Barksdale
Dr. Greta Rensenbrink

Marshall University
December 2022

APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Ethan Tackett, affirm that the thesis, *The Godfather of Modern Political Consulting: Matthew Reese* meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Department of History and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Kat Williams, Department of History Committee Chairperson Date 11/10/2022



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ABSTRACT

Matthew Reese, a professional political consultant from West Virginia, worked on numerous major campaigns in the latter part of the twentieth century and transformed the profession.

Scholars have studied and written about the increasing role of professional political consultants since their emergence in the mid twentieth century, but no scholarship has been dedicated to Matthew Reese. This analysis of Reese and his legacy examines the impact that he has had on political consulting from serving in a key advisory role for John Kennedy's 1960 West Virginia Primary campaign, to creating his own political firm, being the first to use computer software to assist in data collection and campaign and leaving behind an impressive pedigree of consultants that continue to use similar methodology today.

INTRODUCTION

When Matthew Reese passed away in 1998, *The Washington Post* heralded him as a “godfather of the professional political consulting business.”¹ Reese entered the political fray in the 1950s, but it was not until after his work as Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia during John Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign that he became a prominent figure in professional political consulting. By the time he sold his political consulting firm in 1987 and went into retirement, he had worked with numerous presidents, senators, governors, mayors, campaigns in Latin America and private companies such as AT&T.² Yet, despite being a pioneer in the field, little scholarship exists on Matthew Reese and the few that do exist he is not the focus of. Political historians, while acknowledging Reese’s contributions, have not devoted scholarship to him. The current scholarship that exists looks at the field, its methods and history in a broad scope. This thesis represents an expansion on the studies of political consulting by focusing on an individual who influenced what it is now.

This study concurs with *The Washington Post* that Reese is the godfather of modern political consulting. Matthew Reese not only helped pioneer political consulting into the modern era, but he also helped bridge the field as it moved away from political machines and party bosses typical of the nineteenth century into the super precise polling and data consulting that it is today. He identified hardcore voters, those who always go to the polls no matter the candidates or issues, and softcore voters, people who only went to the polls during an election that they

¹ Bart Barnes, “Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71,” *Washington Post*, December 3, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/campaigns/junkie/links/reese.htm>.

² Sharron Warren Walsh, “British Marketing Group Buys 2 Area PR Firms,” *Washington Post*, August 28, 1987, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1987/08/28/british-marketing-group-buys-2-area-pr-firms/b9565e3d-51b5-49aa-a14e-53d65d7e9a9e/>.

were interested in such as a presidential election.³ As the Computer Age dawned in the later part of the twentieth century, Reese embraced the new technology and methods, again ushering in change in the political world. In 1978, Reese became the first political consultant to use computer software to assist him in his work. The program, Claritas, allowed for precise technique in pinpointing supporters and opponents of issues or candidates.⁴ Furthermore, Reese trained many political consultants, and his influence is felt through work using similar methodologies that he championed.

During the nineteenth century, political machines and their bosses dominated politics. A political machine is an organization that sought to get and maintain votes and control of the political entity they ran for. Famous examples include Tammany Hall of New York headed by infamous party boss William “Boss” Tweed. By 1890 every major city had a political boss or were in the process of developing one.⁵ The bosses organized neighborhoods, balanced tickets and in exchange for one’s loyalty offered patronage to get and hold onto power.⁶

This spoils system and the power of machines waned as the twentieth century dawned. Patronage was effectively outlawed in 1883 by the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act.⁷ The new merit-based system came in the aftermath of President James A. Garfield’s assassination.

³ Dennis W. Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 197.

⁴ Rudy Maxa, “Can Matt Reese and a System Called Claritas Answer the Prayers of Democrats Everywhere? The Search for Votes Is Never Ending,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 1979.

⁵ William V. Shannon, “The Political Machine I: Rise and Fall the Age of The Bosses,” *American Heritage* 20, no. 4, June 1969.

⁶ William V. Shannon, “The Political Machine I: Rise and Fall the Age of The Bosses.”

⁷ U.S. Congress, 1883, “An Act to regulate and improve the civil service of the United States, January 16, 1883.” [Pendleton Act], Milestone Documents, National Archives and Record Administration, accessed June 20, 2002, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/pendleton-act>.

Charles Guiteau murdered President Garfield on the false belief that his support of Garfield was critical and thus he was deserving of a job. The reform brought federal appointments away from how the Jacksonian era spoils system that dominated the nineteenth century operated and closer to how they operate today on a merit system.⁸

While political machines declined, political consulting began to grow, filling the void that the machines left behind. The first political-consulting firm created was Campaigns Inc., founded in 1933 by Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter.⁹ The two worked together to put out an information campaign that attacked novelist and Democratic candidate for governor in California, Upton Sinclair. Like how machines operated, they wrote and conveyed messages to the voters trying to earn their vote. Sinclair claimed he lost because his opponent had the Lie Factory working for them, taking lines that Sinclair wrote in his works of fiction and citing them as if Sinclair said it himself in a serious manner, out of story, out of character.¹⁰ Politics had turned into a business. The duo started with print advertising, but as technology advanced, so did the changes in politics. In 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania became the first radio station to air presidential election results. The next election, 1924, national political conventions were broadcasted by radio.

Baxter believed that until campaigns began to turn towards political consulting and management that campaigns were “the natural province of broken-down politicians and camp

⁸ U.S. Congress, 1883. “An Act to regulate and improve the civil service of the United States, January 16, 1883.” [Pendleton Act]

⁹ Jill Lepore, “How Politics Became a Business,” *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2012, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/24/the-lie-factory>.

¹⁰ Jill Lepore, “How Politics Became a Business.”

followers.”¹¹ Political scientist Edward M. Sait observed in 1927 that running for office had turned into a great selling campaign and that parties compete like a manufacturer of breakfast foods or shaving cream and present their case through newspapers and magazines.¹²

It was not until the 1950s when others realized the work that Baxter and Whitaker were doing in California would pay dividends if they adopted similar practices and decided to enter the fray themselves.¹³ Reese was one of the first to enter the consulting field outside of California in the post-World War II world. In the early days, Reese used data to decide where to go, who to target and how to target. By the time he retired, he was the first in the business to rely on computer programs and their algorithms to help identify, energize, and get voters on their side.

Historians have only recently begun to dissect the impact that the political consultants of the mid to late twentieth century had. The first scholarly work on political consulting, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning*, came from Dr. Larry Sabato in 1981. Sabato is a political science professor at the University of Virginia and is the founder and director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics.¹⁴ “There is no more significant change in the conduct

¹¹ Stanley Kelly, *Professional Public Relations and Political Power*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956).

¹² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 57.

¹³ Jill Lepore, “Political Consulting and The ‘Lie Factory,’” interview by Audie Cornish, *All Things Considered*, NPR, September 19, 2012, audio, 5:45, <https://www.npr.org/2012/09/19/161436246/political-consulting-and-the-lie-factory>.

¹⁴ “Larry J. Sabato,” University of Virginia, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://politics.virginia.edu/people/profile/ljs>.

of campaigns than the consultants' recent rise to prominence, if not preeminence, during the election season," Sabato argued.¹⁵

More contemporary sources on the subject were published in the 2010s. John Hopkins University political science professor, Adam Sheingate, published *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy (Studies in Postwar American Political Development)* in 2015. His work focused on the field's explosion in use and importance after World War II. Former political consultant and Professor Emeritus at the George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management, Dennis W. Johnson published his book *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting* in 2016. Johnson contextualized the history of political consulting and into what it had evolved. While both works contribute to the historiography, they evaluate political consulting. This scholarship builds upon the historiography by providing a perspective of the life, style, and tactics of one man who did grow political consulting.

The research in this thesis is backed up by Matthew Reese's own personal collection. In the 1970s and 1980s, Reese began to donate his personal papers, call sheets, voter data, campaign materials, etc., that his firm collected on campaigns to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston. The archives there housed his work for decades until the mid-2010s when it transferred the collection to Marshall University Special Collections. Since the collection's move to Marshall, it has grown in material with additional donations made by Reese's wife and surviving family.

¹⁵ Larry J. Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987), 3.

Along with Reese's own papers and data, the research pulls information from government data as well. Data from the Census Bureau is used extensively and paired with election data from Reese's internal numbers or election results from the National Archives.

The research also contains numerous oral histories conducted by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. These interviews were done by oral historian William L. Young in the mid-1960s. The interviews concern President Kennedy and those who collaborated with him. One such interviewee is Matthew Reese himself, detailing his time and work with the president. Other interviewees such as Kennedy campaign workers Robert P. McDonough, Andrew Houvouras, and Bob Myers recount their perspective of Kennedy, the campaign and even Reese himself. Included with the oral histories are also speeches from politicians such as President Kennedy from the campaign trail and at political events.

Newspaper articles from publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are also used in the research. These articles offer a glimpse into how the news of these events were perceived at the time that they occurred. They also highlight opinions of those that shared them in editorials. Publications like *WV Metro News* and news clips from news channel WSAZ local to Reese's home are also used to better show the impact that Reese had on his hometown and state.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to political consulting and Matthew Reese. This chapter defines what a political consultant is and what they do. It provides the history of the field as it grew out of declining party machines and into the media empire that it is now. It also provides the background to Matthew Reese and his life; how the young man from Huntington, West Virginia, got his start in the political world and ended up collaborating with leaders of the Democratic Party throughout the latter part of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two examines the 1960 West Virginia Democratic Primary. Plenty of scholarship exists on the primary and the 1960 presidential election. However, this chapter maintains a focus on Reese and his work on the campaign. As Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia, Reese and his team worked out of a hotel in Charleston up to eighteen hours a day. There they employed mass telephone campaigns to contact voters which was a first of its kind. Additionally, Reese was a key advisor for the Kennedy campaign, suggesting how the campaign could overcome the issue of Kennedy's Catholicism and frosty reception from labor unions. This chapter argues that Reese helped make Kennedy and his campaign successful and ushered in the political consulting that experts, such as Sabato, believe was the most momentous change in how campaigns are conducted.

Reese's work after his time with President Kennedy and his legacy is the subject of Chapter Three. Reese moved to Washington D.C. after Kennedy's victory to continue his consulting career. He received a job with the Democratic National Committee and spearheaded the DNC's voter registration drives, adding four million voters to the registration lists. Then he founded his firm Matt Reese & Associates, which later became Reese Communications Companies Inc. With his firm, Reese advanced the field into the modern age by being one of the first consultants to use the computer in processing data and using hyper-precise targeting to identify trends within neighborhoods and producing unique targeting for that cluster through a process known as geodemography. Many important political consultants in the last part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century got their start working for Reese, and their styles and tactics emulate Reese's. Also, Reese's employment of women helped make the male-dominated field more accepting of women workers and those in leadership roles.

The conclusion examines the legacy that Matthew Reese, his work, and methods has left on politics and political consulting. Political consulting is even more engaging today than it was in Reese's time thanks to the advent of tools such as social media and the 24/7 news cycle that allows a politician or campaign to constantly remain in contact with voters. A smartphone user might hear a political ad while on Spotify or might see a political ad while searching through Google today. These ads are made, evaluated, and designed with that type of user in mind. This is the natural evolution of how political consultants reach their intended audience. The conclusion makes clear that Reese was a major contributing factor to how political consulting is today.

This study is an essential expansion of the scholarship that exists on professional political consulting. By examining Matthew Reese, his methodology and his impact, this thesis makes the case that Reese has shaped political consulting into what it is now. The profession makes heavy use of personalized advertisements that target precise audiences through the usage of data gathered from computer software. Reese is the first to use such software. Since his time with the Kennedy campaign in West Virginia, he showed how effective personalization is when engaging with prospective voters.

CHAPTER ONE: POLITICAL CONSULTING AND MATTHEW REESE

The twentieth century saw the emergence of political consulting as a professional career and an increasingly important part of the electoral process. The growth of professional political consulting was a natural evolution of politics after the decline of party bosses and the growth of mass media in the twentieth century. Mathew Reese was a major figure in this creation and continued evolution of professional political consulting. Reese's life, education, participation in John Kennedy's 1960 primary in West Virginia, and continued adoption of the latest campaigning technology played critical roles in preparing him to revolutionize political campaigning and consulting. Because of his forward thinking, Reese helped Kennedy win the crucial West Virginia primary. He later became the first leading political consultant to adopt computer software and new practices for consulting. These practices and software are commonplace in today's political consulting. These accomplishments make him an important figure in modern political consulting.

A native of Huntington, West Virginia, Matthew Reese was born in 1927.¹⁶ Reese was brought up as a Republican, typical of the time as the Democrats had only won West Virginia once in the presidential elections during the twentieth century up to his birth.¹⁷ His family voted exclusively for the Republican Party.¹⁸ At age eighteen, Reese was drafted into military service

¹⁶ Shauna Johnson, "Papers From 'Godfather' of Political Consulting Now Housed at Marshall University," WV MetroNews, October 31, 2016, <https://wvmetronews.com/2016/10/31/papers-from-godfather-of-political-consulting-now-housed-at-marshall-university/>.

¹⁷ Shauna Johnson, "Papers From 'Godfather' of Political Consulting Now Housed at Marshall University."

¹⁸ John Houvouras, "The Godfather," *The Huntington Quarterly*, 1995,

and returned to Huntington at the conclusion of his service.

He grew up with an interest in politics, but when he enrolled into Marshall College (now Marshall University) he did not have an idea of what he wanted to do.¹⁹ Growing up, he was interested in getting and maintaining good grades, but did not care much for the learning part of school.²⁰ He recalled that growing up in Huntington the information of the outside world was limited and the extent of his knowledge came from school and the local newspapers.²¹ Despite the aimless feeling, he majored in political science and minored in philosophy.

At Marshall, Reese met instructors Conley Dillon and M.G. “Bernie” Burnside. The two political science instructors influenced Reese a great deal and inspired him to seek a career in politics. His politics were also shaped during his time at Marshall. He learned about and later met Walter Reuther, the president of the United Auto Workers. Reuther was one of the twentieth century’s most prolific leaders for organized labor. He was an advocate in collective bargaining, workplace safety, worker education and enhancement, healthcare, retirement, and life balance benefits and was named by *Time* magazine as one of the most influential people of the twentieth century.²² Inspired by instructors, liberal politics and politicians of the time, Reese sought a career in politics.

<http://www.jackhouvouras.com/portfolio/biographies/matt-reese>.

¹⁹ John Houvouras, “The Godfather.”

²⁰ John Houvouras, “The Godfather.”

²¹ John Houvouras, “The Godfather.”

²² Rory Gamble, “In Tribute: Walter Reuther's Impact Endures and Teaches.,” UAW, May 9, 2020, <https://uaw.org/tribute-walter-reuthers-impact-endures-teaches/>.

While Reese began his storied political career, the field of political consulting emerged within California politics. Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, launched his campaign to be California's governor with a novella about "a true story of the future."²³ *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty*, was a different type of alternative history. It told a story from the future where Sinclair was successful in his bid for governor and by re-election time in 1938, he had eradicated poverty in the state. Sinclair, a Socialist running as a Democrat, won the Democratic nomination in August 1934. This came as a shock to everyone as he won with more votes than any primary candidate in California had ever won before, almost all hundred and twenty seats in the state legislature were held by Republicans and it happened exactly how Sinclair penned in *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty*.²⁴ Sinclair's unlikely rise prompted the candidate for Republican lieutenant governor to hire Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter to attack Sinclair. The duo formed the first professional political consulting firm in history, Campaigns Inc., and then locked themselves away in their house for three days, reading all of Sinclair's works, speeches, and statements. They devised a plan to use his work outside of their original context to attack Sinclair. The work that the two did together is the first professional political consulting of its kind and served as a natural progression of politics after the decline of party bosses and machines of the nineteenth century. Both journalist Sidney Blumenthal and political scientist Larry Sabato agree that political consulting became the dominant force within the political system, replacing party bosses.²⁵

²³ Upton Sinclair, *I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty* (Los Angeles, CA: End Poverty League, 1934), 1.

²⁴ Jill Lepore, "How Politics Became a Business."

²⁵ Adam Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 153.

Political machines controlled urban politics. A party machine was present in nearly every major city. These machines, often through a patronage or spoils system, used their influence and money to further grow their power over the people and neighborhoods in its control. The machines tailored their message to their audience and even to the geographic area that they were working in. As the Progressive Era dawned, this way of doing politics grew increasingly unpopular. The most famous political machine and its boss, William “Boss” Tweed of Tammany Hall in New York City came under the crosshairs of *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* publisher and founder, George Jones, was offered a \$5 million bribe if *The New York Times* stopped their digging into Tweed.²⁶ Jones refused and continued publishing damning stories on Tweed and his circle.

On July 29, 1871, *The New York Times* ran their article “How New York is Governed: Frauds of the Tammany Democrats.” It was so popular that it sold more than 500,000 copies including a German-language version.²⁷ The German publication of *The New York Times* was a first for the paper. German Americans were a distinct ethnic group in New York City and had supported Tweed and his machine. By publishing the exposé in German, it allowed the very people being taken advantage of by Tweed’s machine to see the evidence and to garner support behind municipal reform.²⁸ The German article was an early modern example of targeting a specific audience to get political messaging across, a tactic Reese would later champion. Reese,

²⁶ David Dunlap, “A Happy 200th to The Times’s First Publisher, Whom Boss Tweed Couldn’t Buy or Kill,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2011, <https://archive.nytimes.com/cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/16/a-happy-200th-to-the-times-first-publisher-whom-boss-tweed-couldnt-buy-or-kill/>.

²⁷ David Dunlap, “1871 | To Skewer Boss Tweed, The Times Spoke German,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2015, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2015/05/25/1871-to-skewer-boss-tweed-the-times-spoke-german/>.

²⁸ David Dunlap, “1871 | To Skewer Boss Tweed, The Times Spoke German,”

however, attempted to reach his audience through grassroots campaigns such as telephone blitzes or mass mailings.

Tweed's downfall, President Garfield's assassination a decade later in 1881, and the emergence of the Progressive Era served as the death knell for political machines. Charles Guiteau assassinated President James Garfield, believing that his work helped get Garfield elected and thus was deserving of a job. This thought process was not an uncommon one at the time as the nation's politics operated on a spoils system.²⁹ Garfield's assassination resulted in the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883. The act provided that federal government jobs be awarded based on merit and that government employees be selected through competitive exams. It also made it unlawful for one to be fired or demoted for political reasons.³⁰ The Prohibition movement also grew in the late nineteenth century which Progressives at the same time were in support of. Some were for it out of religious motivation, but others sought to bring on Prohibition to diminish the power that local bosses had on bars.³¹ Even after the repeal of Prohibition, political bosses and their machines did not return to the same power that they once had.

Despite Whitaker and Baxter being the first professional political consultants, they remained alone in the political realm. Several advising firms appeared in California during the late 1940s and 1950s, but none had the reach that Campaigns Inc. had. The other firms that did work in politics, most of whom were former workers for Campaigns Inc. such as Harry Lerner, Thomas Page, and Robert Alderman, worked on smaller projects such as city campaigns in San

²⁹ The spoils system dominated American politics until the late nineteenth century. A political party or politician awarded its supporters government jobs once they won the election.

³⁰ U.S. Congress, 1883. "An Act to regulate and improve the civil service of the United States, January 16, 1883." [Pendleton Act]

³¹ James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement: 1900-1920*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press), 1963.

Francisco.³² It was a prelude to Matthew Reese and his work with John Kennedy, the Democratic National Convention, and later his own firm. Like Whitaker and Baxter, Reese worked on numerous campaigns with media blitzes to get the vote out. He began his work at the time when others realized they could emulate Whitaker and Baxter's work from California and apply it elsewhere to national politics to create a perpetual campaign. He had access to newer technologies that allowed him to reach an audience even greater than Campaigns Inc. by being one of the early adopters of the computer.

At age twenty-six in 1954, Reese got his first opportunity to work in electoral politics when his former instructor, Bernie Burnside, ran for the House of Representatives in West Virginia. Burnside left his faculty role at Marshall College to run for Congress and was successful but lost his seat in 1952.³³ However, Burnside ran again in 1954 and was successful in winning his seat back. Reese volunteered for the Burnside campaign and then traveled to Washington D.C. with Burnside and worked as an administrative assistant for two years until Burnside's second and final defeat.³⁴ Jack Houvouras, a freelance writer based out of Huntington, West Virginia, chronicled that the experience was not a monumental awakening for Reese, but it did provide the impetus for future political involvement.³⁵

Without a job in D.C., Reese returned home to West Virginia and worked for his father. He devoted his free time to the Young Democrats and became their executive secretary. "I sold

³² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire a History of American Political Consulting*, 36.

³³ "BURNSIDE, Maurice Gwinn," History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/10230>.

³⁴ John Houvouras, "The Godfather."

³⁵ John Houvouras, "The Godfather."

insurance, I sold *Britannicas*, I sold cars for my father. I needed to do that to make a living until I met John Kennedy,” remembered Reese.³⁶ While Reese worked in D.C., the two met by chance on the Capitol steps and spoke briefly. Reese admired the Senator. “He had a great attractiveness as a candidate. As someone who has been interested in politics, I was naturally attracted to him,” Reese recalled in a 1964 interview with William Young for the John F. Kennedy Library.³⁷ The two did not have further interactions until Kennedy ran for president in 1960.

Reese collaborated with Democrats throughout West Virginia during his time with the Young Democrats. He traveled throughout the state to train election workers.³⁸ While the work was minuscule compared to the work that Reese later did, it did provide him with the connections necessary to jumpstart his political career. Through the training sessions he conducted, Reese met Robert McDonough, a political strategist from Parkersburg, West Virginia. McDonough had been a longtime supporter of John Kennedy and was the lone Kennedy supporter in West Virginia’s delegation in 1956.³⁹

In 1959, Reese received a letter in the mail from the Democratic National Committee asking which candidate he was supporting.⁴⁰ A dedicated Democrat, Reese admired Kennedy as

³⁶ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 82.

³⁷ Matthew Reese Jr., interview by William L. Young, October 24, 1964, transcript, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, Boston, MA, available online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/sites/default/files/archives/JFKOH/Reese%2C%20Matthew%20A/JFKOH-MAR-01/JFKOH-MAR-01-TR.pdf>

³⁸ Robert P. McDonough, interview by William L. Young, July 3, 1965, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, Boston, MA, available online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKOH/McDonough%2C%20Robert%20P/JFKOH-RPM-03/JFKOH-RPM-03>

³⁹ Thomas Oliphant and Curtis Wilkie, *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year Campaign* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2017,) 136.

⁴⁰ Reese, Jr., interview.

well as his challengers Hubert Humphrey, Adlai Stevenson, and Lyndon Johnson. He selected John Kennedy because “[Kennedy] looked to me like he was a winner and would make a great candidate and a great President.”⁴¹ It was because Reese was an early backer of Kennedy, he was among the first to be offered an opportunity to do volunteer work for Kennedy.⁴² Few in West Virginia were supportive of Kennedy prior to the election season. Nor were many in West Virginia aware of the Senator and his stances before then. Reese’s early knowledge and the backing of Kennedy put him on the campaign’s radar as someone ready and willing to work.

In the winter of 1959, Reese was contacted by Robert McDonough, now the director of John Kennedy’s primary campaign in West Virginia, to meet with him, Ted Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and was asked for his opinion on what John Kennedy should do. McDonough felt that “the consensus...of the working politicians was that the West Virginia primary was a hazard in that if you won it, you didn’t get anything because the delegate by law were not committed, and if you lost it, you had a black mark against you.”⁴³ However, Reese believed that “the Senator ought to come into West Virginia.”⁴⁴ Despite still just being a volunteer, Reese for the first time in his career began to advise politicians. Reese invited the two Kennedy brothers and McDonough to his hometown of Huntington, organized a dinner with local leaders and got Ted Kennedy airtime on the local stations.⁴⁵ The leaders and Reese conveyed that it was important to get Kennedy in the state as soon as possible. The longer they waited, the harder it would become

⁴¹ Reese, Jr., interview.

⁴² Reese, Jr., interview.

⁴³ Oliphant and Wilkie, *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year*, 136.

⁴⁴ Reese, Jr., interview.

⁴⁵ John Houvouras, “The Godfather,”

to overcome the Catholic issue. The state was almost 95 percent non-Catholic, and some areas were vehemently anti-Catholic.⁴⁶ A December 1959 poll by pollster Lou Harris indicated that Kennedy's Catholicism "would be a problem in some sections of the border state where hard-shell Protestantism makes for strong religious sentiments," but that Kennedy did poll well among Protestants and exceptionally well among Catholics.⁴⁷ Yet, Reese convinced them that West Virginia was an opportunity. A victory there would put the issue over Kennedy's Catholicism to rest.⁴⁸

The Kennedy campaign was convinced and began operations in West Virginia. McDonough offered Reese a job and he graduated from volunteer work to paid work.⁴⁹ He left working for his father and for the first time since his work with Representative Bernie Burnside, Reese was on a payroll for a politician as the Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia. Reese was offered the job because of how skillful he was as an organizer, and he had a "personality that allowed him to be quite a harmonizer."⁵⁰ He was experienced in the administrative side of politics. It was what he exclusively worked with while he was in D.C. with Burnside. Through his volunteer experience throughout the state, Reese learned about the inner workings of West Virginia politics. For instance, he was aware that in the southern and central parts of the state, the people enjoy politics and have a good record getting out to vote.⁵¹ Those

⁴⁶ Oliphant and Wilkie, *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year*, 136.

⁴⁷ Earl Mazo, "2 Primaries Seen Crucial for Kennedy," *New York Herald*, March 18, 1960.

⁴⁸ Oliphant and Wilkie, *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year*, 136.

⁴⁹ McDonough, interview.

⁵⁰ McDonough, interview.

⁵¹ Reese Jr., interview.

areas, he described, “are pretty drab and unexciting,” so bringing a candidate and the issues to the area brought great excitement and energized the people.⁵²

Reese’s in-depth knowledge of the state was crucial for the Kennedy campaign in 1960. Slating, the practice of down ballot voting, was common at the time in West Virginia during primaries. Within each county’s party there are sub-factions and they do not always stay together. One group gets together for a particular group of candidates and tries to build a slate from the President down to the Justice of the Peace.⁵³ Attaching oneself to a slate can be the difference between winning or losing that county. With Reese being hired, the Kennedy campaign had an inlet for someone who had a pulse of West Virginia voters and knew which slates would be best to attach themselves to.

Reese oversaw all campaigning and get-out-the-vote efforts in West Virginia, a role he maintained throughout his career on the various campaigns that he worked on. His methodology was highly influenced by the *O’Brien Manual*.⁵⁴ The manual was a sixty-four-page grassroots fieldwork and volunteer plan first put together by Kennedy ally, Larry O’Brien, when John Kennedy ran for Senate in 1952.⁵⁵ O’Brien broke the campaign down part by part to ensure that everyone had a role, and they performed that role to the best of their ability. It was adaptable to different state elections as well as the national election and contained data that was pertinent to the election that it was being used for.⁵⁶ The manual consists of two parts. The first part concerns

⁵² Reese Jr., interview.

⁵³ Reese Jr., interview.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 102.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 102.

⁵⁶ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers. Scrapbooks, 1960-1972. [Section 2: Kennedy Campaign Manual 1960]. LOBPP-264-002 John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

State Organizational Procedure and the second part detailed descriptions of various specific campaign procedures, including “the extremely important telephone, tabloid distribution, and transportation campaigns.”⁵⁷ The manual served as a campaign’s framework.

In the first part, the *Manual* stressed that a committee should be formed to conduct the election, but that its members are to provide a geographical balance so that the committee does not favor one area more than the other. These committee members then elect their officers which were the chair, vice chair, finance chair, publicity chair, treasurer and any other office as may be locally determined.⁵⁸ Further into the *Manual* provided expectations of each position and how they work with other positions. It had a heavy emphasis on grassroots support, such as young people knocking on doors and women working the telephones. O’Brien believed that grassroots efforts provided a competitive edge for a campaign by appealing to everyday people with everyday people.⁵⁹

The *Manual’s* second part detailed recommendations for maintaining a headquarters for the campaign, how to recruit volunteers and then assign duties to these workers from working the telephones, to overseeing transportation (driving voters to and from the polls) to campaigning in the precinct that they work in.⁶⁰ The location of the headquarters should maintain full-time staff and, if possible, find vacant stores that are rent free or close to the main business section of

⁵⁷ Lawrence F. O’Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁵⁸ Lawrence F. O’Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁵⁹ Lawrence F. O’Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁶⁰ Lawrence F. O’Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

towns.⁶¹ Much like in the first part where the *Manual* wanted the representation among officers balanced the second part required the same thing for volunteers.⁶²

The second part also emphasized the importance of just one vote and how important it is to get said vote. The version of the *Manual* used in the 1960 election cited examples from 1954 elections such as the New York Senate race where Averell Harriman defeated Senator Irving Ives by only a fraction more than one vote per precinct. It also cited a race in Montana where Senator James Murray was re-elected by one vote per precinct to display just how important it is to reach and gain every voter possible.⁶³

For the 1960 West Virginia primary, Reese adhered closely to the *O'Brien Manual*. He and dozens of volunteers worked up to eighteen hours a day on the telephone campaigning for John Kennedy.⁶⁴ He assembled and maintained the organization of Kennedy chairs in forty-five of the fifty-five counties in West Virginia.⁶⁵ He also served as the liaison for the in-state leadership throughout the counties and the out-of-state leadership such as Robert Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, Larry O'Brien, and Ken O'Donnell.⁶⁶

A tactic that Reese used at the county level borrowed from the *O'Brien Manual* was having his volunteers provide contact lists whether it was club memberships, PTAs or Christmas

⁶¹ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁶² Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁶³ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers, Scrapbooks.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 102.

⁶⁵ Reese Jr., interview.

⁶⁶ Reese Jr., interview.

card mailings and created custom letters for the recipients.⁶⁷ O'Brien first did this in 1952 when tens of thousands of women received engraved invitations, addressed by hand, to meet Kennedy and his family.⁶⁸ It was cost efficient as well. For a particular instance during the West Virginia primary, 15,000 invitations were sent out and 5,000 people arrived. For the cost it was to rent the venue, send the mail, and to provide cookies and tea it only came out to be just nineteen cents per person.⁶⁹

If an issue arose throughout the state, Reese was sent in as a whip to ensure progress resumed smoothly. In March, the campaign was having difficulties in organizing in Mercer and Mingo Counties. As a result, Reese and McDonough were sent to the counties to organize.⁷⁰ If a politician had flipped and was now pro-Kennedy, Reese and/or McDonough were to gauge the politician to determine if it was smart for the campaign to associate themselves with them on the slate.⁷¹

Reese was recognized for his challenging work for Kennedy during the 1960 election and became the deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee. He was also assigned to run the voter registration division drive for Lyndon Johnson's re-election in 1964.⁷² Using elements of the *O'Brien Manual*, Reese spearheaded a movement that saw four million voters added to the

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

⁶⁸ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

⁶⁹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

⁷⁰ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers. John F. Kennedy Campaigns, 1954-1960. 1960 Campaign: West Virginia.

⁷¹ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers. John F. Kennedy Campaigns.

⁷² Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

registration lists, the largest drive of its kind at the time.⁷³ The effort was made by telephone which O'Brien had emphasized to Reese just four years before. The drive impacted the 1964 presidential election. The national voter turnout increased from the previous election to 61.9%. President Johnson's 61.1% popular vote was the highest of any candidate since the 1820 election (which James Monroe ran unopposed).⁷⁴ President Johnson won the election in an electoral landslide with 486 electoral votes to Barry Goldwater's 52 electoral votes.⁷⁵

It was after Reese's work with Kennedy and the DNC that he began to forge his own path and became a leading voice in the evolution of modern political consulting. He founded Matt Reese & Associates, which later became Reese Communications Companies (RCC).⁷⁶ RCC was one of the first political consulting firms in the nation.⁷⁷ Like other consultants, Reese worked on a commission basis. The more polls, pieces of mail, or television advertisements a consultant provided, the more money they made from the campaign that hired them.⁷⁸ Fellow consultant, Jill Buckley, believed that "it became abundantly clear...that if you were selling a real product like the media, you could charge significantly more for it...[and] you could get the respect of campaigns because they thought you were selling something that they truly didn't know how to

⁷³ Bart Barnes, "Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71."

⁷⁴ *1964 Electoral College Results* (February 21, 2022), distributed by National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/1964>

⁷⁵ *1964 Electoral College Results*.

⁷⁶ Bart Barnes, "Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71."

⁷⁷ John Houvouras, "The Godfather."

⁷⁸ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 159.

do.”⁷⁹ Consulting firms were able to work for cheap while making a profit. “We made a profit on the letter. We made a profit on the phone calls. We made a profit on the computer work. We made a profit on the polling,” said Reese.⁸⁰ Reese was among the first to turn political consulting into a business in the latter part of the twentieth century.

When hired, Reese honed in on targeting precincts most likely to turn the election in his client’s favor.⁸¹ The kind of voters he had in mind were undecided voters and voters who favored a candidate, but seldom went to the polls.⁸² The hyper precision was also notable as he began this method in an era before computers were able to process the raw data to provide an indication of where the campaign should go. The data was processed by hand. Using the data gathered, Reese was able to put together instant coalitions, recruit hundreds of block captains, and utilize telephone banks.⁸³

When computers became accessible and affordable beginning in the 1970s, Reese was the first in the political consulting business to use the technology. He secured an exclusivity deal with the makers of software called the Claritas Cluster System. The software was developed by statistician Johnathan Robbin in the early 1970s. Robbin created a system called PRIZM (Potential Rating Index by ZIP Markets) by linking consumer information with the information

⁷⁹ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 159.

⁸⁰ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 159.

⁸¹ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁸² Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁸³ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

from US ZIP codes, census tracts, and enumeration districts.⁸⁴ Robbin did not have political consulting in mind when creating the PRIZM and firms initially stayed away from the program due to how expensive it was.⁸⁵

Reese and pollster Bill Hamilton saw potential in the program. In 1978, they purchased exclusive campaign rights to use the product.⁸⁶ It combined surveys and market research to provide even greater precision in targeting campaign communication and outreach efforts.⁸⁷ Using Claritas, Hamilton could poll a sample group of voters in a state and tell Reese what kinds of people think of a specific issue or candidate.⁸⁸ With the data that Hamilton gathered, Reese was able to create a campaign strategy to appeal to whomever he wanted to reach.⁸⁹ The mass mailings and telephone campaigns that Campaigns Inc., O'Brien and even Reese once oversaw can now become more precise with its targeting. "Polls by themselves are valuable but inadequate. For example, a poll may tell a campaign consultant that working-class Catholic housewives aren't favorably impressed with a candidate...now Claritas can specify block groups most likely to contain working-class Catholic women," explained Reese to *The Washington Post*. The data clusters allowed Reese to deepen his work in a process known as geodemography and

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

⁸⁶ Rudy Maxa, "Can Matt Reese and a System Called Claritas Answer the Prayers of Democrats Everywhere? The Search for Votes Is Never Ending."

⁸⁷ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁸⁸ Rudy Maxa, "Can Matt Reese and a System Called Claritas Answer the Prayers of Democrats Everywhere? The Search for Votes Is Never Ending."

⁸⁹ Rudy Maxa, "Can Matt Reese and a System Called Claritas Answer the Prayers of Democrats Everywhere? The Search for Votes Is Never Ending."

grow the field.⁹⁰ These groupings allowed Reese to identify “leaning persuadables” and target them specifically.⁹¹

With their exclusive access to Claritas, campaigns paid Reese and Hamilton to compute raw data and to assist them in targeting the leaning persuadables. The data showed that people who share similar demographic, housing, and socio-economic characteristics tend to live in homogeneous neighborhoods and share similar lifestyles, thus they have similar potential for products and react similarly to media, direct mail, and other promotions.⁹² This knowledge allowed Reese to carefully craft a message that appealed to the residents of a specific neighborhood to gain their vote.

Access to such data also makes it cheaper for the consultant. Rather than the approach in the past that targeted its audience indiscriminately, the data clusters provided by Claritas allowed for more precise mailings. It also took some emphasis from television ads since they could target a household rather than a general area. In 1978, Reese was hired on behalf of organized labor to defeat a statewide ballot initiative that would have turned Missouri into a “right-to-work” state.⁹³ Polls suggested that a majority of Missouri voters would vote for the measure, but Reese targeted almost 600,000 households that he believed would vote against the measure if persuaded to show

⁹⁰ Geodemography is the targeting of precincts, neighborhoods, or individual blocks with specific messaging. It links together the demographics of a region and its geography. The process itself had been informally used in the past. Reese had used it his entire career and Larry O’Brien before him. In fact, its origins can be traced to the work of human ecologists in the 1920s and 1930s. What made the science behind geodemography different this time is that by the 1970s there was a commercial interest in geodemographic analysis. Claritas was the first system to develop a multivariate clustering system.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

⁹² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

⁹³ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

up on Election Day.⁹⁴ He spent less than 15 percent of his budget on television ads; instead, he concentrated his resources to target persuadable voters through a combination of door-to-door visits, phone calls, and specially tailored mailings.⁹⁵ Reese reasoned television commercials would inspire the opposition and attract opponents who normally would not vote, the opposite of the intended result.⁹⁶

The targeting paid off when the initiative lost despite polling finding it would have won. Reese estimated that 110,000 new voters registered and an increase in turnout contributed to the amendment losing with only 40% of the vote.⁹⁷ Author of *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, Adam Sheingate, correctly observed that the victory demonstrated the power and precision of sophisticated targeting methods to identify voters open to the message of the campaign.⁹⁸ The efficiency of Reese's use of the program convinced other consultants to use it as well. The Claritas system was dubbed the "New Magic" and soon politicians began to use it themselves. Birch Bayh was the first candidate to use the Claritas system while running for president in 1980.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁹⁵ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁹⁶ Thomas Joseph Karam, "Political Imagemaking: An Analysis of the Television Commercials Aired During Louis Lambert's 1979 Gubernatorial Campaign" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1982), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁹⁷ Thomas Joseph Karam, "Political Imagemaking: An Analysis of the Television Commercials Aired During Louis Lambert's 1979 Gubernatorial Campaign."

⁹⁸ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 161.

⁹⁹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

Contemporary consultant and former associate of Reese, Walter D. Clinton, asserted that “Matt Reese began the whole theory of targeting.”¹⁰⁰ Reese identified “hardcore voters” and “softcore voters.” Hardcore voters were individuals, who always went to the polls, even in low-turnout elections regardless of the candidates or issues. Targeting these voters was crucial in low-visibility races such as primaries.¹⁰¹ Softcore voters, however, are voters who only go to the polls in elections in which they are interested. These elections are highly visible races such as the presidential elections.¹⁰² Before it became standard to compile the data centrally, voter data was done county by county with different formats. Compiling this information before Claritas and similar computer programs in the late 1970s and early 1980s was tedious or as Clinton put it “a nightmare.”¹⁰³

Claritas still works today though it is no longer exclusive for political consultants. The efficiency demonstrated by Reese has allowed it to transcend politics. According to their website Claritas argues that “all marketing is personal. So, the more marketers know about current customers and potential prospects, the better.”¹⁰⁴ Major companies of numerous backgrounds such as Farmers Insurance, Goya, H&R Block, McDonald’s, Volkswagen, and Comcast all make use of Claritas.¹⁰⁵ The program has over 10,000 highly predictive demographic and behavioral indicators and comprehensive multicultural data to help give marketers the most complete

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 197.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 197.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 197.

¹⁰³ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 197.

¹⁰⁴ “Custom Targeting and Audience Segments.” Claritas LLC, February 4, 2022. <https://claritas.com/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Custom Targeting and Audience Segments.”

understanding of the American consumer.¹⁰⁶ The process used for these private companies is still similar as it was when it was used by Reese for politicians. The audience is identified and from there they deliver multichannel execution to the intended audience. Afterwards, they measure and optimize the performance and refine their strategies for the audience.¹⁰⁷

The late 1970s and early 1980s was the height of Reese's career. From 1980 to 1982, he directed more than thirty campaigns. In 1982 alone, he oversaw fourteen campaigns. These campaigns stretched from the American East Coast to Hawaii to South American nations such as Venezuela.¹⁰⁸ *Campaigns and Elections Magazine* contended that at one point, nearly every Democratic political consultant in the business had worked for Reese.¹⁰⁹

Joe Slade White, President Joe Biden's long time media strategist and whose firm has worked on four hundred campaigns, got his first job from Matthew Reese in 1973.¹¹⁰ He was named the Democratic Strategist of the year by the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) in 2014.¹¹¹ Walter (Wally) Clinton, founder, and owner of the American Directions Group (ADG) also got his start working for Reese. He worked for Reese for four years and left to find the Clinton Group (now the ADG). The ADG has recruited more than two million grassroots activists, made more than fourteen million survey calls, and has worked on thousands of ballot initiatives and political campaigns in all fifty states, Canada, South and

¹⁰⁶ "Custom Targeting and Audience Segments."

¹⁰⁷ "Custom Targeting and Audience Segments."

¹⁰⁸ John Houvouras, "The Godfather."

¹⁰⁹ John Houvouras, "The Godfather."

¹¹⁰ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 139 – 140.

¹¹¹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 139 – 140.

Central American and Europe.¹¹² Nancy Todd, the first woman inducted into the AAPC Hall of Fame, was first employed by Reese in 1979. She has worked on 196 campaigns in forty-two states and six countries. She has a 98%-win rate and was instrumental in legalizing casinos in Mississippi, Indiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and New York.¹¹³ Charles Manatt Jr. worked as the Democratic national chair in the early 1980s. He also began his career at the grass-roots level working for Reese.¹¹⁴ By the time that Reese retired from politics in the early 1980s, his pedigree was massive, with some form of connection to nearly every Democratic consultant.

The early 1980s proved hectic for Reese. He traveled across America from the mainland to the Hawaiian Islands and back to keep up with the campaigns on which he was working. “I knew what we were supposed to be doing, but you can’t remember the details of fourteen different campaigns,” Reese confessed during his retirement.¹¹⁵ So, he transitioned his services to the private sector. He previously flirted with corporate work in the late 1970s. In 1976, he managed a campaign in New York on behalf of the tobacco industry to build support for a cut in the cigarette tax.¹¹⁶ In 1980, he and Bill Hamilton used Claritas in California to determine which California voters would be in support of creating nonsmoking sections in public places.¹¹⁷ He

¹¹² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 202 – 203.

¹¹³ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 298.

¹¹⁴ Bart Barnes, “Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71.”

¹¹⁵ John Houvouras, “The Godfather.”

¹¹⁶ Matt Reese to William O’Flaherty, Tobacco Tax Council, October 15, 1976, Document 03681379, University of California, San Francisco Legacy Documents Library, <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/#id=zhdc0105> accessed July 12, 2022.

¹¹⁷ Tabular Report, Nationwide TSI Survey, June 1980, Hamilton and Staff, Document T102170784 San Francisco Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/#id=jql10004>, accessed July 12, 2022.

also conducted a massive grassroots lobbying campaign on behalf of the Natural Gas Supply Association that targeted potential supporters for a letter-writing campaign.¹¹⁸ He carried out these practices when he worked for AT&T, Chevron, and United Airlines among many others.¹¹⁹ Reese Communications Companies became one of the first firms to begin to collaborate exclusively with private companies and apply its philosophies in the private sector. These companies were paying large sums to have access to the precise science that Reese had harnessed by doing direct mail advertising and issues marketing.

The business side of politics grew further in the late 1980s when Reese decided to sell his firm, Reese Communications Companies and its subsidiary, Targeting Systems, Inc. (TSI) to a British marketing firm, Wire and Plastic Products, Limited (WPP) for \$35 million with \$14 million received up front and another \$21 million for meeting five-year targets.¹²⁰ Reese was amazed by how much he received for Reese Communications. “I mean, I’d have sold it for half that, gladly,” he joked a decade later.¹²¹ He was severely underestimating the increasing value of firms. Before purchasing RCC, WPP bought out JWT Group Inc., parent of J. Walter Thompson Co., then the world’s fourth-largest advertising agency, for \$566 million.¹²² In the five years before Reese’s sale of RCC and TSI, the combined revenue of the two sister companies grew

¹¹⁸ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 162.

¹¹⁹ Bart Barnes, “Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71.”

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 351.

¹²¹ Transcript of Matthew Reese oral history, interviewed by John Franzén. American Association of Political Consultants Interview Collection; George Washington University Libraries, Part 1 of 2, December 12, 1996, 2.

¹²² Walsh, “British Marketing Group Buys 2 Area PR Firms.”

from \$4.5 million to \$14.4 million. Their profits before taxes grew from \$512,000 to \$3.5 million.¹²³

Reese Communications Companies and JWT Group Inc.'s acquisition was just the beginning of conglomerates consuming political and advertising firms. WPP began as a British wire basket manufacturer and now it is the world's largest advertising and public relations company. It generates \$17 billion in annual revenues and operates more than 350 firms in forty-nine countries.¹²⁴ Twenty-six of these firms work in the United States and specialize in political consulting, polling, and lobbying.¹²⁵

Since the 2010s, WPP has attempted to make a spot for itself in the digital marketplace through additional mergers and acquisitions. WPP acquired the digital advertising agency AKQA for \$540 million.¹²⁶ The following year Burson-Marsteller, a firm that the company purchased in 2001 announced that they are partnering with the Republican firm Targeted Victory, the leading provider of digital services to the Republican Party.¹²⁷

WPP is not alone in the corporate takeover of consulting firms. The Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc. (IPG), Publicis Groupe, and Omnicom Group together with WPP make up what

¹²³ Walsh, "British Marketing Group Buys 2 Area PR Firms"

¹²⁴ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

¹²⁵ Among the additional political consulting firms that WPP owns includes the Benenson Strategy Group (whose founder worked as the lead pollster for President Obama in 2012) and the Dewey Square Group (which worked for John Kerry in 2004 and Hillary Clinton in 2008) with both firms working for Hillary Clinton in her 2016 presidential bid. WPP owns conservative firms as well. Other firms owned by the WPP is the Prime Policy Group, whose chairperson, Charlie Black, worked for Presidents Reagan, H. W. Bush, and Bush.

¹²⁶ Eric Pfanner, "WPP Acquires AKQA to Beef Up Digital Marketing," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/business/global/wpp-acquires-akqa-to-beef-up-digital-marketing.html>.

¹²⁷ Eric Pfanner, "WPP Acquires AKQA to Beef Up Digital Marketing."

The New York Times hailed as Advertising's Big Four.¹²⁸ These firms sometimes serve companies larger than themselves. Their work ranges from private companies seeking advertising consulting to political campaigns.¹²⁹

Most of these corporate developments occurred after Matthew Reese retired and after he passed away. However, that does not diminish the significance that his influence had to lead up to the mega corporations blurring the lines between political consulting and advertising. The bleed over between marketing and political consulting also grew in the 1980s, spearheaded by Reese himself. His work with companies like AT&T was done through his firm, RCC, not by himself personally or another subsidiary of RCC. Private companies became increasingly interested in gathering, growing, and applying their market data to expand their reach. Using geodemography and the concept of targeting leaning persuadables, if Reese were able to tell if a working-class Catholic family on Baker Street would vote one way but the working-class Protestant family on Able Street would vote another way, private companies could gather similar data to determine how the Catholic family on Baker Street would react to an advertisement compared to the Protestant family on Able Street.

Using the voter file data and commercial data to create a list of persuadable voters, campaigns target their audience.¹³⁰ If three households were watching the same show as it aired,

¹²⁸ Stuart Elliott, "Advertising's Big Four: It's Their World Now," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/31/business/advertising-s-big-four-it-s-their-world-now.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

¹²⁹ Of the Big Four, two companies are American, one is British, and the other is French. However, despite their national origins, the companies employ hundreds of thousands of people in over one hundred countries worldwide. They consult major companies with global reach such as Coca-Cola to political campaigns such as Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 runs. Most of the world's global advertising and public relations are controlled by these four companies and their subsidiaries.

¹³⁰ Alex Byers and Emily Schultheis. "Political Ads' New Target: Individuals." Politico, February 14, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/political-ads-latest-target-individuals-103443>.

Household A would receive a political commercial whereas Household B would have received a different political commercial, but Household C might not see either commercial at all.¹³¹

By selling his firm, Reese was one of the first to sell off, a trend that accelerated in the latter part of the 1980s. WPP's and others growth point to a corporate consolidation of political and marketing work in the United States.¹³² Despite the partisan nature that comes with the work of political consulting, the firms make strides to avoid losing potential customers on either side of the aisle. That is why these firms have subsidiaries that work with liberal candidates and issues exclusively and conservative candidates and issues exclusively.

The efforts made by early consultants such as Reese transformed the professional political consulting business into what it is now. The practices and technology that he introduced to the field are commonly applied today by consultants. The tactics that Reese pioneered and refined throughout his career are rooted in his involvement in the West Virginia primary. Because of his work with the Kennedy campaign in West Virginia, they were able to reach out to voters in unprecedented ways and influenced the election to favor Kennedy. Influenced by the theories by Larry O'Brien during the primary, Reese refined them and launched his career through the success he brought the Kennedy campaign. The 1960 West Virginia primary is not just where Reese got his career's start, but also the practices that are still used today were introduced on a large scale, making Reese one of the most important political consultants in history.

¹³¹ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 181.

¹³² Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 192.

CHAPTER TWO: CAMELOT IN WEST VIRGINIA

Matthew Reese's career as a professional political consultant began with his work on the 1960 West Virginia Democratic Primary. Reese used his political experience to assist Senator John F. Kennedy to victory in West Virginia and eventual election to the presidency. Scholars such as political scientist David Corbin recognize the importance that Kennedy's victories had, but Reese's role in political consulting and grassroots activism is often overlooked.¹³³ Reese was able to mobilize a large volunteer base through grassroots efforts that helped organize Kennedy campaign events, helped eliminate the concerns among voters concerning Kennedy's Catholicism, and secured the support of high-profile Democratic leaders that aided the Kennedy campaign to victory.

Political historians have heralded the 1960 West Virginia primary as one of the most important elections in modern history.¹³⁴ History and political science professor Robert Rupp described the impact the election had as a type of foreshadowing for how future political campaigns were going to be run. Slating, the process in which the voter voted for candidates that aligned themselves with one another during the campaign and making deals with political leaders were still an important part of the election, though it was becoming less important and infrequent in general for politics. Instead, the 1960 presidential election showed the increased importance of spending vast amounts of money to appeal to voters. With the unprecedented amount of money

¹³³ David A. Corbin. "John F. Kennedy Plays The 'Religious Card': Another Look at the 1960 West Virginia Primary," *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies* 9, no. 2 (2015): 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wvh.2015.0027>.

¹³⁴ David A. Corbin. "John F. Kennedy Plays The 'Religious Card': Another Look at the 1960 West Virginia Primary."

that was poured into the election, and the use of the latest technology such as the television, the campaign focused on creating an image of a candidate as the first popular-culture political celebrity.¹³⁵

Reese was working with the Kennedy campaign on a modern style of campaigning for office. Primary elections were still new at the national level by the time of the 1960 West Virginia primary. The Progressive Era held the first primary elections. The process allowed a state's citizens to cast the vote for the candidate that they want to represent their party in the general election. It was one of the many progressive reforms during the era to eliminate the power that political bosses and backroom politics had.¹³⁶ The idea of primaries did not catch on nationally until after World War II. Both World Wars and the Great Depression made it hard to continue to enact reforms.¹³⁷ Several states adopted primary elections, but not every state followed suit. As a result of fewer primaries, the importance of each election was heightened as close primary races made it more likely for the nominee to be decided at that party's national convention rather than commanding a clear mandate that they could be the nominee.

Of the 1,523 delegates that would be at the 1960 Democratic convention in Los Angeles, California that summer, only 584 came from slates associated with primary results. The party bosses controlled the remaining delegates in the thirty-four remaining non-primary states.¹³⁸ Because of this, Kennedy believed the only path he had to the nomination was through victories

¹³⁵ Robert O. Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2020), 3.

¹³⁶ "U.S. Political Conventions & Campaigns." US Political Conventions and Campaigns. Northeastern University. Accessed July 22, 2022. <http://conventions.cps.neu.edu/history/the-progressive-era-reforms-and-the-birth-of-the-primaries-1890-1960/>.

¹³⁷ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 3.

¹³⁸ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 24.

in the primaries so that the will of the voters could not be denied.¹³⁹ Political analysts at the time disagreed with the idea that a primary can help propel a candidate to election. An article published in January 1960 in the *Charleston Gazette* headlined “Primary Won’t Elect a President.” The reporter who authored the article, Harry Hoffman, concluded the piece by writing that “you don’t get elected president by winning the West Virginia primary.”¹⁴⁰

West Virginia had traditionally been a Democratic state going into the spring of 1960. At the time of the election, the Democratic Party was in control of the state government and had been since Franklin Roosevelt’s election in 1933. West Virginia Democrats maintained a two-to-one edge in registration and had majorities in both houses of the state legislature. Because the politics of the state so heavily favored the Democrats, the most important election was the one in May, not the one in November since most of the work was “over the day after the primary.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, this put more attention on the primary between Kennedy and Humphrey for West Virginia voters. Theodore White, author of *The Making of a President 1960*, speculated that had Humphrey withdrawn from West Virginia when he lost in Wisconsin then it would have made West Virginia’s primary less important. Because Humphrey failed to carry Wisconsin it would have been best for him to withdraw from West Virginia to let the election become meaningless and give Eastern party bosses a chance to choose the nominee.¹⁴²

Despite Humphrey’s loss in the Wisconsin primary, the Kennedy campaign did not feel that the West Virginia primary was one to look over. The Humphrey campaign continued to believe

¹³⁹ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 24.

¹⁴¹ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 24.

¹⁴² Theodore H. White, *The Making of a President, 1960* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1960), 95.

that West Virginia was viable due to the state's strong union membership, vast unemployment, and an overwhelming number of Protestant voters.¹⁴³ After Humphrey entered the contest, the Kennedy camp sent campaign leadership, Robert Kennedy, Larry O'Brien, and Kenny O'Donnell to Charleston to meet Bob McDonough, the director of John Kennedy's campaign in West Virginia. Kennedy and McDonough met with Matthew Reese and workers at the Kanawha Hotel and asked why the state voter's reception to the Kennedy camp was cold. One worker replied "there's only one problem. He's a Catholic."¹⁴⁴ Historian Dan Fleming concluded this reception shocked the Kennedy campaign, and it forced the campaign to think seriously if they should pursue an effort in West Virginia.¹⁴⁵

The importance of Reese's political consulting became increasingly evident during the election as the Kennedy campaign began addressing the conservative-leaning West Virginia electorate and their concerns regarding Kennedy's Catholicism. During the Charleston meeting, Reese urged the leadership that the sooner they could get Kennedy in West Virginia, the better for the campaign. It was important because the longer they waited, the harder it would be to overcome the Catholic issue. Thomas Oliphant and Curtis Wilkie in their book *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year Campaign* recognized how difficult the Catholic issue would be for the campaign if they could not get out ahead of it. The state was almost ninety-five percent non-Catholic, and some areas of the state was vehemently anti-Catholic.¹⁴⁶ The co-chair of the John F. Kennedy for

¹⁴³ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Daniel B. Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 32.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel B. Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination*, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Oliphant and Wilkie, *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year*, 136.

President in Cabell County, Andrew Houvouras, recalled that rural towns in West Virginia that had no Catholic churches spread anti-Catholicism literature.¹⁴⁷

The Kennedy leadership hired Reese to be the Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginians. Reese was responsible for organizing the grassroots campaigning throughout most of the state. He oversaw the construction of Kennedy for President clubs or organizations in forty-five of the state's fifty-five counties.¹⁴⁸ Because Reese led the grassroots efforts through most of the state, McDonough dubbed Reese's job as the "people desk" since he kept track of everybody over the state, where they were and what they were doing.¹⁴⁹ "He played a responsible and vital part in the part," McDonough remarked about Reese in 1964.¹⁵⁰ McDonough was impressed by how effective Reese's leadership was in these counties. "Matt started tightening up the counties I hadn't been able to pay much attention to and going into some counties that I had not been able to get into."¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Reese also functioned as the state campaign's liaison for out-of-state leadership such as Robert Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, Larry O'Brien, and Ken O'Donnell.¹⁵²

Whereas Reese organized the Kennedy campaign's structure, Humphrey's campaign structure was nonexistent. Unlike the Reese-led Kennedy campaign, Humphrey's team made no

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Houvouras, interview by William L. Young, July 10, 1964, transcript, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, available online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKOH/Houvouras%2C%20Andrew%20J/JFKOH-AJH-01/JFKOH-AJH-01>.

¹⁴⁸ Reese Jr., interview.

¹⁴⁹ McDonough, interview, July 3, 1965.

¹⁵⁰ Robert McDonough, interview by William L. Young, December 5-6, 1964, transcript, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, Boston, MA, available online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKOH/McDonough%2C%20Robert%20P/JFKOH-RPM-01/JFKOH-RPM-01>

¹⁵¹ Richard Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy* (Richard Robbins, 2020, 44.

¹⁵² Reese Jr., interview.

effort to establish a presence in many West Virginia counties. Instead, the Humphrey campaign divided the state into two parts, a northern part, and a southern part, and recruited only two state cochairs.¹⁵³ The campaign also lacked the same grassroots support that Reese employed in Kennedy's campaign. William L. Jacobs, one of the Humphrey's campaign co-chairs, recalled that his only asset was a telephone card with the names and numbers of known friends, Democratic leaders and lawyers that were partial to Humphrey.¹⁵⁴

Reese's preferred method of reaching potential voters in West Virginia resembled the strategy that Campaigns Inc. previously utilized in California, including flooding the state with mailings and ads while strengthening the grassroots support network. This philosophy is rooted in the *Larry O'Brien Manual*. In the first part of the *Manual*, it demonstrated how to form a committee to tap into grassroots support. O'Brien argued that grassroots efforts were the most effective method of campaigning since it was ordinary people appealing to ordinary people and provided an edge for a campaign if they participated in it.¹⁵⁵ Reese also assembled the Kennedy chairpersons using the same strategies that were described in the *Manual*. Political scientist Dennis Johnson argued that through this organization came a potent volunteer base.¹⁵⁶

An example of the grassroots outreach that Reese conducted was having his volunteers craft and send out personalized messages to West Virginian voters. The twenty-four women that worked for him in Charleston were asked to bring a list of all their club memberships, PTAs, and Christmas card recipients. Using the names from these lists, the campaign contacted as many West

¹⁵³ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 22.

¹⁵⁴ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers. Scrapbooks.

¹⁵⁶ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

Virginia voters as possible and sent out panel cards of invitations that said, “West Virginians for Kennedy cordially invites you to meet the Senator and Mrs. Kennedy.”¹⁵⁷ The invitation was sent out in a formal manner, appealing to those who wanted to be involved in something special. Reese and his workers maintained a file system to prevent duplication of voters on the lists. The cross-checking and filing system introduced was new at the time and Reese used it for the remainder of his career. Reese and his volunteer campaign workers did not exclude registered Republicans in their mass mailings. Reese believed that if they won the primary then they would be trying to appeal to these voters in the general election. Additionally, the cost of these invitations were only nineteen cents per person, so sending the invitations to register Republican voters was not cost prohibitive.¹⁵⁸ The inexpensive cost of the letters allowed Reese to host events like this throughout the state at little cost to the campaign.

Another example of the popularity of the campaign’s outreach involved an event in Huntington, West Virginia. The campaign sent out 15,000 cards for people to attend the event and meet the Kennedys. The campaign sent thousands of invitations. Reese expected only several hundred people to show up to the event. Conversely, Reese and his staff were shocked when 5,000 people arrived. People kept arriving which forced the fire marshal to close the venue and refuse to let additional people into the event.¹⁵⁹

Reese’s grassroot workers also prepared and provided campaign material, staffers, and money to other candidates that they felt were competitive within their county to show that Kennedy

¹⁵⁷ Reese Jr., interview.

¹⁵⁸ Reese Jr., interview.

¹⁵⁹ Reese Jr., interview. Thomas Oliphant and Curtis Wilkie cite this event as a factor in the campaign’s success. They argue that events like this provided fresh energy for the Kennedy campaign.

supported statewide Democrats. This method called the “kitty” was one that Reese said that every candidate was expected to partake in. If a campaign was successful with contributing to the “kitty” then it contributed to the success in statewide and down ballot races. Each candidate was expected to put money into the “kitty” to hire workers and cars. The “kitty” assisted in the gubernatorial race and local elections all the way down to Justice of the Peace. If the campaign associated with a popular down ballot candidate, it would reflect in the polls as voters would vote for them also since they paid into that candidate’s “kitty.”

The Kennedy campaign did not offer gubernatorial candidates access to the “kitty” though. Candidate and eventual governor William Barron refused to openly take a side. He remained “aloof” according to Robert McDonough.¹⁶⁰ However, as the election drew closer Barron’s campaign attempted to establish a relationship with Kennedy’s. Barron’s campaign reached out and proclaimed that if Kennedy supported him in certain counties, then he would support Kennedy in other counties. This attempt to work with the “kitty” was shut down immediately though. McDonough turned down the proposition because they believed that Kennedy had more to offer than Barron.¹⁶¹ Consequently, the Kennedy campaign did not have the help of the Barron campaign nor did the Barron campaign have help from Kennedy’s.

This type of down ballot slating has been observed by scholars. In his work *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, historian Richard Robbins revealed that the Kennedy campaign attempted to attach themselves to a county’s faction with the “most muscle.”¹⁶² If they were not successful with the strongest faction, they

¹⁶⁰ McDonough, interview, July 3, 1965.

¹⁶¹ McDonough, interview, July 3, 1965.

¹⁶² Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 234.

tried to work with the next strongest faction down the ballot. Once they became tied to a faction, they sent scores of their volunteers and money to make that faction the county's strongest.¹⁶³

Robert Rupp, West Virginia Wesleyan College political science professor, also acknowledged the Kennedy campaign's use of slating. He points out that the process was not new to American elections but remained an important part of West Virginia's electoral process.¹⁶⁴ In West Virginia's capital Charleston, a voter had the selection of fifty-three individual candidates. When the *Charleston Gazette* reproduced sample ballots in Kanawha County, it required three newspaper pages.¹⁶⁵ Rupp states plainly that a slate of preferred candidates was practical to the average voter as it expedited what could have been a prolonged process.¹⁶⁶ Reese attaching the Kennedy campaign to the most successful slates contributed to the campaign's victory. Voters expected a quick and straightforward process to vote, and the slate of preferred candidates allowed them to be in and out of the voting booth in reasonable time.

Kennedy's Catholic religious beliefs were a major issue for the campaign entering the West Virginia primary. Before the Wisconsin primary was over, Kennedy's campaign was in West Virginia to speak with religious leaders to try and erase their fears. In March 1960, Charles G. Peters Jr., the head of Kennedy's campaign in Kanawha County, hosted a confidential luncheon with a dozen prominent Protestant ministers and two rabbis, but the luncheon did not garner the

¹⁶³ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 234.

¹⁶⁴ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 22.

¹⁶⁶ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 22.

attendance that they anticipated.¹⁶⁷ The polls that the Kennedy Camp conducted throughout 1958 and 1959 showed Kennedy winning with a 70-to-30 margin also began to disappear. Just three weeks before the primary, Kanawha County polled sixty percent of potential voters for Humphrey and forty percent for Kennedy.¹⁶⁸ Kennedy was frustrated with the dwindling lead. His advisors explained that “no one in West Virginia knew you were a Catholic in December. Now they know.”¹⁶⁹ Despite the change in poll numbers and worries over his beliefs, Reese did not fear that Kennedy’s Catholicism was an issue. If anything, he believed that it energized West Virginia Democrats and West Virginia Catholics alike.

I think that the fact that the President was a Catholic and the fact that that was such an issue brought a lot of very talented, very able volunteers to the political arena. A friend of mine in Huntington told me that he was not working so hard for Kennedy because Kennedy was Catholic. He said, ‘I’m working hard for Kennedy because I’m a Catholic.’ It was important to him.” The fact this man was a Catholic was of very little importance. If he had only been a Catholic, he would have been defeated, but he was much more than a Catholic. Consequently, this was not an important element in the election. Actually, it may have helped us in some areas.¹⁷⁰

The primary concern for Bob Myers, one of the three co-chairmen of John F. Kennedy for President in Cabell County, was not whether Kennedy was elected or not, but that West Virginia would not be slandered in the media as religiously intolerant.¹⁷¹ He even credited the support of Catholics as a major reason Kennedy won Cabell County and even the whole state.

¹⁶⁷ Harry W. Ernst, *The Primary That Made a President: West Virginia 1960*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1962.

¹⁶⁸ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 101.

¹⁶⁹ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 101.

¹⁷⁰ Reese Jr., interview.

¹⁷¹ Bob Myers, interview by William L. Young, July 11, 1964, transcript, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, Boston, MA, available online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKOH/Myers%2C%20Bob/JFKOH-BOM-01/JFKOH-BOM-01>

Most of the money was raised from Catholics. There is no question about it, our Catholic population here contributed substantially to the total Kennedy effort. In fact, without the Catholic assistance and volunteers and financial arrangements, we probably wouldn't have much of a Kennedy campaign in Cabell County.¹⁷²

Myers added that eighty to ninety percent of the active volunteer effort was by members of the Catholic faith.¹⁷³

Another one of the co-chairmen for Kennedy in Cabell County, Andrew Houvouras also sensed that the Catholic issue was not as major of a concern as initially feared.¹⁷⁴ Houvouras believed that the campaign won because they organized a large volunteer base early. The makeup of the volunteers were people from across the state and various backgrounds. Drawing again from the lessons of the *O'Brien Manual*, the Kennedy campaign stressed the importance of a geographical balance between the volunteers.¹⁷⁵ This balance ensured that the committee and its workers did not favor one area of the state more than another.

Historian Dan Fleming is dismissive of the impact that the religious issue had on the campaign. He cites evidence such as Kennedy winning mock elections at public schools and polls held at factories that showed Kennedy winning in run-away fashion.¹⁷⁶ He also uses the large crowds that turned out at Franklin Roosevelt Jr.'s appearances as a reason that it is clear in retrospect that Kennedy having any sort of trouble in West Virginia was overblown.¹⁷⁷ What

¹⁷² Bob Myers interview.

¹⁷³ Bob Myers interview.

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Houvouras, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Lawrence F. O'Brien Personal Papers. Scrapbooks.

¹⁷⁶ Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination*, 64.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew Houvouras, interview.

Fleming overlooks in that analysis is the work that done to counter the anti-Catholic feelings due to declining poll numbers. Additionally, he overlooks that the popularity of the Roosevelt name in West Virginia that would have driven crowds out regardless of the reason and the cold reception to Kennedy from union and blue-collar workers.¹⁷⁸

The campaign countered the anti-Catholicism sentiments that arose during the primary. Opponents of Kennedy placed copies of a fake oath that the Knights of Columbus allegedly swore to in West Virginia resident's mailboxes. Other anti-Kennedy literature warned that if a Catholic were elected president that the Catholics would attack Protestant pregnant women, split open their stomachs and bash the fetus's head with stones.¹⁷⁹ If the campaign could identify a religious leader or church who had circulated the literature, the campaign dispatched a staffer to show them the fallacy in their belief. In some cases, the leaders apologized for spreading misinformation and in other cases the campaign threatened prosecution if they did not cease their slander.¹⁸⁰

Kennedy himself tackled the religious matter on his first day of campaigning in West Virginia. After spending the day walking around the streets of Charleston speaking with the locals, Kennedy stopped to address a crowd of three to four hundred people.¹⁸¹ The audience was composed of young college students from Morris Harvey College (now the University of Charleston). One of the audience members asked Kennedy about his religion and Kennedy responded

I am a Catholic, but the fact that I was born a Catholic, does that mean I can't be president of the United States? I'm able to serve in Congress, and my brother was able to give his

¹⁷⁸ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 93.

¹⁷⁹ Andrew Houvouras, interview.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Houvouras, interview.

¹⁸¹ McDonough, interview.

life, but we can't be president. There is nothing in my religious faith that prevents me from fulfilling my oath of office. If I thought there was, I shouldn't have been a senator. I shouldn't have been a congressman and, to be frank, I shouldn't have been taken into the service of the United States during World War Two.¹⁸²

Robert McDonough remembered that Kennedy's response won the crowd over. It was not a response that they were expecting or prepared for, but it was an answer that was respected.¹⁸³ The response from the crowd was not overwhelming, but it shifted towards a warmer reception regarding his faith.¹⁸⁴

Despite the public's reaction to Kennedy's religion appearing to be less of an issue, the Kennedy camp remained concerned it was the central issue. In March, McDonough and Reese flew representatives of the state's sectors that they devised to Washington D.C. The purpose of this meeting was so that campaign leaders could meet with members of the Kennedy team to determine if the religious issue had made Kennedy's victory impossible. McDonough, Reese, and Kennedy's staff all met with Robert Kennedy, the Senator's brother, and leading campaign aide, and reviewed a map of West Virginia to evaluate Kennedy's election prospects across the state. Bob Myers, co-chair of John F. Kennedy for President in Cabell County, informed Robert Kennedy that he did not think that John Kennedy's Catholicism was a "tremendous factor, although it certainly would be a factor."¹⁸⁵ Robert Kennedy remained unconvinced and asked the group for ideas on how his brother could overcome the public's misconceptions of his religious beliefs. A

¹⁸² Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 87.

¹⁸³ McDonough, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 87.

¹⁸⁵ Myers, interview.

national Gallup poll from 1959 showed that twenty percent of polled voters would not support a Catholic for president even if the person were “generally well qualified.”¹⁸⁶

Myers suggested that the campaign could attach itself to an already popular political name in West Virginia, the Roosevelts.¹⁸⁷ Again, Kennedy was unconvinced until Matt Reese spoke up and recounted a conversation that he had with a friend on the streets of the southern West Virginia town of Logan just before he flew to D.C. He remembered that his friend bragged that Eleanor Roosevelt once stood in the very spot where they were standing. Reese assumed he meant just recently until he realized his friend was talking about when Eleanor visited the town in 1934. Once Reese explained the god-like worship of the Roosevelts in West Virginia and the legacy they still carry there, Kennedy was interested. Because of New Deal policies, the Roosevelts were highly revered. After the meeting concluded, Robert Kennedy called up the son of the former president, Franklin Roosevelt Jr., to ask if he would help Kennedy in West Virginia.¹⁸⁸

Myers and Reese’s suggestion to bring the Roosevelts into the campaign was a pivotal moment for the Kennedy campaign. In Williamson, West Virginia, the son of the famed president stood in front of a window of a floral shop that hung a photo of President Roosevelt and a sign that read “Franklin D. Jr. will be here today.” There in the coal fields, Roosevelt Jr. proclaimed that he wanted the crowd to know that he is a Protestant, and he is campaigning for Kennedy.¹⁸⁹ He also further highlighted Kennedy’s military service during World War II. In Greenbrier County, Roosevelt accused Humphrey of asking the draft board for several military deferments during

¹⁸⁶ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 33.

¹⁸⁷ Myers, interview.

¹⁸⁸ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 66.

¹⁸⁹ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 184.

World War II. “These are the facts, and I resent any man who claimed he was 4F all the way through the war when he really stayed out of his own request until just before the end of the war,” Roosevelt told television reporters.¹⁹⁰ Kennedy publicly disapproved of Roosevelt Jr.’s comments, but the campaign got the information about Humphrey “from an anonymous source in Minnesota,” and the campaign “decided that the material should be made public by FDR Jr.”¹⁹¹

Roosevelt Jr.’s involvement in the campaign also provided Kennedy a chance to garner more support from the Democratic elite. Kennedy was not popular among the Democratic elite. Former president Harry Truman believed that Kennedy was too young to be president. Roosevelt Jr.’s mother, Eleanor Roosevelt, sided with Truman.¹⁹² Adlai Stevenson, the de facto leader of the Democratic Party having been the party’s nominee for president in 1952 and 1956, remained silent on the matter. However, in private Stevenson was also concerned that Kennedy’s age was a problem.¹⁹³ West Virginia’s longtime senator, Robert Byrd, asked his people to vote for Humphrey. “If you are for Adlai E. Stevenson, Senator Stuart Symington, Senator Johnson, or John Doe, [this primary] may be your last chance [to stop Kennedy.]”¹⁹⁴ Despite his plea to vote for Humphrey, Byrd was not a Humphrey supporter. He backed his friend and ally, Senator Lyndon Johnson, to be the party’s nominee and if he could help secure a Humphrey victory in West Virginia then it would likely create a contested convention where he could help Johnson secure

¹⁹⁰ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 184.

¹⁹¹ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 184.

¹⁹² Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 32.

¹⁹³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White*, 32.

¹⁹⁴ W.H. Lawrence, “‘Stop Kennedy’ Drive Led by Byrd of West Virginia,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1960.

the nomination.¹⁹⁵ When Kennedy first registered to enter the West Virginia presidential primary, Byrd distributed a questionable poll in terms of methodology that showed Lyndon Johnson as the state's top choice and Kennedy was the last choice among Democratic local leaders.¹⁹⁶

Theodore White observed that the introduction of Roosevelt to the campaign shifted the state's sentiment on not just Kennedy's Catholicism, but Kennedy's personality and history. Polls out of Charleston, West Virginia showed that Humphrey led sixty-four percent to Kennedy's thirty-six percent, but two weeks before the election the lead slipped to fifty-five percent over forty-five percent. On the weekend before the election Kennedy gained the lead forty-five percent to forty-two percent.¹⁹⁷ Reese tapping Roosevelt Jr. into the campaign paid off as Kennedy mounted a growth in polling numbers. Even the dismissive historian Irwin Gellman wrote that Roosevelt's endorsement of Kennedy was almost like "God's son coming down and saying it was all right to vote for this Catholic, that it was permissible, and it was not something terrible to do."¹⁹⁸ Richard Robbins called Roosevelt's campaigning for Kennedy "masterful" and that a lot of West Virginians signed on to the campaign because of the Roosevelt attraction.¹⁹⁹

Another major hurdle the Kennedy campaign had to overcome was the lack of support they received from unions. This startled Reese at first, telling William Young, an oral historian for the

¹⁹⁵ W.H. Lawrence, "'Stop Kennedy' Drive Led by Byrd of West Virginia."

¹⁹⁶ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 32. W.E. Chilton III, the editor of *The Charleston Gazette* and Harry Hoffman, the *Gazette's* top political reporter, reported that the poll was stacked against Kennedy, and only selective Democrats were surveyed.

¹⁹⁷ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 32

¹⁹⁸ Irwin F. Gellman, *Campaign of the Century: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 123.

¹⁹⁹ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 41.

Kennedy Library, that it disturbed the campaign a great deal.²⁰⁰ The politically-influential former President of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), John L. Lewis, favored Stuart Symington, a senator from Missouri.²⁰¹ Lewis was upset at Kennedy for his role in passing the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Labor-reform bill that regulated labor unions' internal affairs and their relationship with employers.²⁰² The president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT or better known as The Teamsters) James "Jimmy" Hoffa, disliked the Kennedys saying, "We don't support spoiled millionaires."²⁰³ Joining the Teamsters, the forty-thousand-member UMWA also supported the stop Kennedy movement. John L. Lewis "passed the word" to mine leaders throughout West Virginia that he would like to see Kennedy defeated.²⁰⁴ Humphrey hoped to rely on union leadership and union voters to carry him in West Virginia.²⁰⁵ His natural constituency consisted of the voting bloc of blue-collar workers and union members.²⁰⁶

The UMWA represented a key voter block for the Kennedy campaign. It was the largest union in West Virginia and was confronting a crisis as the coal industry witnessed the nation's consumption of coal dropping to twenty percent of its energy supply.²⁰⁷ West Virginia coal mining

²⁰⁰ Reese Jr., interview.

²⁰¹ Joseph Loftus, "Lewis Backs Move to Stop Kennedy," *New York Times*, April 13, 1960.

²⁰² "National Affairs: Stop Signs," *TIME*, April 25, 1960,
<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,826269,00.html>.

²⁰³ Carroll Kilpatrick, "Kennedy Cites Hoffa Role," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1960.

²⁰⁴ Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination*, 24.

²⁰⁵ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 103.

²⁰⁶ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 19.

²⁰⁷ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 217.

jobs also dropped by thirty-five percent from 1946 to 1960 with a peak number of jobs being 116,421 in 1947 to only 42,900 jobs in 1960.²⁰⁸ President Franklin Roosevelt allowed UMWA President John L. Lewis to organize his miners and at their peak the UMWA wielded considerable political influence.²⁰⁹

The IBT endorsed Humphrey and became the first industrial labor union to endorse either candidate.²¹⁰ Reese accused the president of the Charleston local of the IBT of sharing anti-Kennedy rhetoric and taking orders directly from Hoffa to endorse Humphrey. Eugene Carter denied the accusation and informed Reese that it was only natural for the West Virginia Teamsters to make such an endorsement after Kennedy's repeated attacks on their leader.²¹¹ He tried to turn the IBT endorsement into a liability rather than an asset for Humphrey.

If Senator Humphrey is as outraged about the support of Mr. Hoffa and his racketeer associates as he portrays himself to be, it is high time he repudiated Mr. Hoffa and told him he wanted no help of any kind from him. The intervention of Mr. Hoffa in West Virginia is just added evidence of the character of the gang-up against Senator Kennedy in West Virginia, which has brought together the strangest array of political bedfellows in the history of American politics.²¹²

Not all the state's union leadership stood against Kennedy. A flier from West Virginians for Kennedy in 1960 revealed that AFL-CIO's president, George Meany endorsed the Senator. "I wish on behalf of the AFL-CIO, to express again our appreciation for your leadership in the fight to enact a law which will help honest labor and honest management deal with the problems

²⁰⁸ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 217.

²⁰⁹ White, *The Making of a President 1960*, 98

²¹⁰ Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination*, 24.

²¹¹ Ernst, Harry W. *The Primary That Made a President: West Virginia 1960*.

²¹² Ernst, Harry W. *The Primary That Made a President: West Virginia 1960*.

created by a corrupt minority without interfering with the wholesome activities of the overwhelming majority.”²¹³ The flier also contained ringing endorsements from other labor leaders such as Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, David J. McDonald, president of the United Steelworkers’ Union and David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union.²¹⁴ Not only did the flier contain endorsements, it also detailed Kennedy’s battles in Congress for the working-class that won over these union endorsements. He fought the Taft-Hartley Act, supported minimum wage increases, sponsored legislation to distribute surplus food to citizens in need, and provide federal aid to schools.²¹⁵ The flier also detailed Kennedy’s ten-point plan that he debuted in Wayne, West Virginia, an effort he planned to undertake to bring federal government assistance to West Virginia. The flier also details the efforts to strengthen the growth of the railroad industry.²¹⁶

The campaign’s ongoing efforts to attract and maintain grassroots support were apparent during an event in Huntington, West Virginia. Reese traveled with Kennedy to Huntington to appeal to the union workers at H.K. Porter, a steel mill. Just across the street from H.K. Porter was Marshall College (now University) which prohibited Kennedy from visiting the campus. A phone call was made to Marshall student, known Kennedy supporter Bobby Nelson, to see if he could round up students to wait at the edge of Marshall’s campus because a “backward rule prohibiting candidates from visiting campus would make it impossible for him to set foot within

²¹³ Matthew A. Reese Papers. Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University, Huntington, WV.

²¹⁴ Matthew A. Reese Papers.

²¹⁵ The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, better known as the Taft-Hartley Act, weakened the power of labor unions, limiting the type of strikes that they can legally conduct.

²¹⁶ Matthew A. Reese Papers.

the gates of Marshall.”²¹⁷ Nelson gathered dozens of students who waited on Third Avenue to get a glimpse of the Senator. As Kennedy was leaving H.K. Porter, he noticed the crowd of students and made his way to them. Eventually five hundred students ran into the streets, blocking traffic, to listen to Kennedy. There were no announcements or plans made ahead of time. Students found out about the possible Kennedy sighting through word of mouth. Kennedy hopped on the roof of a parked car and with no microphone or megaphone he spoke to the young adults and took their questions.²¹⁸

Huntington’s local news station, WSAZ, interviewed Ken Hechler, then a freshman Representative for West Virginia’s 4th district, and he recalled even more students showing up.²¹⁹ Hechler, who also once served as a political science professor at Marshall College, blamed Marshall’s president Stewart Smith for not letting Kennedy on campus. As the crowd of students grew, Hechler urged Kennedy to speak about the College’s efforts to become a university.²²⁰ Kennedy obliged and spoke about it to the energized crowd. The endorsement of Marshall becoming a university and incorporating a graduate program would upgrade the college and make it semantically equal to the state’s flagship institution, West Virginia University.²²¹

Reese’s engineering of the grassroots efforts and work to secure the blue-collar union bloc was central to Kennedy’s victory in West Virginia. However, sometimes Reese had to switch from the political organizer to surrogate for the candidate. If Kennedy was not feeling

²¹⁷ Matthew A. Reese Papers.

²¹⁸ Matthew A. Reese Papers.

²¹⁹ Wvarchiveandhistory. “WSAZ 50Anniv JFK in WV.”

²²⁰ Wvarchiveandhistory. “WSAZ 50Anniv JFK in WV.”

²²¹ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 114.

well, Reese stumped to fill in for the Senator. One incident occurred after Kennedy contracted laryngitis the day before a series of campaign appearances. He contacted Reese at midnight to meet him in Charleston that morning. Reese agreed, expecting to only deliver one prepared speech, not realizing he agreed to deliver stump speeches throughout the state. While traveling to Boone County, Kennedy wrote on a notepad some points to make, but Reese was unable to read his handwriting. They arrived at each location and Kennedy was introduced but then Reese stepped up and said “No, I’m not John Kennedy, but I’m here to talk for him because his voice is hurting.”²²² He touted Kennedy’s service in the Pacific during World War II and highlighted the fact that he was the only veteran running for president.²²³

While the political jab was more veiled than Roosevelt Jr’s attack on Humphrey’s service, it worked. Rowland Evans, a close friend of Kennedy’s, said that Humphrey’s lack of a war record “undoubtedly hurt” him politically in West Virginia.²²⁴ West Virginia had the highest rate of enlistment among all the states during World War II. To make Humphrey appear as a draft dodger or that he was eligible for 4F classification, meaning that he was unfit for service, was damning. He was running against a World War II hero that saved the lives of his men.²²⁵

Even though the polls in West Virginia were narrowing, the election turned out to be an exceptionally good day for Kennedy. Kennedy won West Virginia with 61% of the vote totaling

²²² Reese Jr., interview.

²²³ Rupp, *The Primary That Made a President: John F. Kennedy and West Virginia*, 135

²²⁴ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 87.

²²⁵ Robbins, *JFK Rising: The 1960 West Virginia Primary and the Emergence of John F. Kennedy*, 87.

236,510 votes to Humphrey's 152,187.²²⁶ That same day he also won the Nebraska primary with 89% of the vote. There, Kennedy scored 80,408 votes to Humphry's 3,202.²²⁷ Dan Fleming attributed Kennedy's victory to several factors. The attraction of Franklin Roosevelt Jr. energized a once concerned population. The campaign slated better than Humphrey's campaign and attached itself to more winning slates. Finally, the campaign generated a large and enthusiastic volunteer organization.²²⁸ As the Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia, Mathew Reese played a critical role in all of these deciding electoral factors.

Because Kennedy had several decisive primary victories in a row, the chances that the Democratic National Convention would be a contested convention lessened. That July in California, Kennedy won the nomination for president on the first ballot at the Democratic National Convention with 806 votes. Lyndon Johnson finished in second with 409 votes and joined Kennedy on his ticket running as his Vice President.²²⁹

John Kennedy kept Reese on the payroll after his nomination and Reese went to work for the campaign throughout the convention and later the general election. At the Democratic National Convention, Reese was summoned to work with the Tennessee delegation that was present. After the convention, Robert Kennedy sent Reese to North Carolina to work in the

²²⁶ "Results of 1960 Presidential Election Primaries," JFK Library, accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/results-of-1960-presidential-election-primaries>.

²²⁷ "Results of 1960 Presidential Election Primaries."

²²⁸ Fleming, *Kennedy vs. Humphrey, West Virginia, 1960: The Pivotal Battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination*, 91.

²²⁹ "First Ballot for Presidential Nominees (1960)," JFK Library, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/fast-facts-john-f-kennedy/first-ballot-for-presidential-nominees-1960>.

leadup to the general election.²³⁰ In North Carolina, Reese served as the state coordinator for the campaign and supervised the planning of Kennedy appearances in the state.²³¹ Like in West Virginia, Reese used the *O'Brien Manual* to build a large and solid grassroots bloc to appeal to North Carolina voters.²³²

Reese's work in West Virginia and North Carolina paid off for the Kennedy campaign when both states went to Senator Kennedy in the general election. That November, despite polling remarkably close with Vice President Richard Nixon in the popular vote, Kennedy decisively won with 303 electoral college votes to Nixon's 219.²³³ All eight of West Virginia's electoral votes went to Kennedy as he won the state with almost fifty-three percent of the vote.²³⁴ Kennedy also won North Carolina's fourteen electoral votes with fifty-two percent of the vote.²³⁵ John Kennedy was elected as the nation's thirty-fifth president, the first Catholic to do so. Matthew Reese had been alongside him, coordinating two successful campaigns that contributed to Kennedy's victory.

Reese was rewarded for his work throughout 1960. He started the year as a volunteer for the Kennedy campaign in 1960 and became one of the campaign's top and most trusted

²³⁰ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

²³¹ Reese Jr., interview.

²³² Reese Jr., interview.

²³³ 1960 Electoral College Results, distributed by National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/1960>

²³⁴ David Leip, "1960 Presidential General Election Results - West Virginia." US Elections Atlas accessed July 23, 2022, <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?f=0&fips=54&year=1960>.

²³⁵ David Leip, "1960 Presidential General Election Results - North Carolina," US Elections Atlas, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=1960&off=0&elect=0&fips=37&f=0>.

consultants. He then became the deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee in January 1961 where he focused on voter registration. “When I went to the DNC, I was honored when they asked me to handle voter registration, because I knew how important it was to the President. The President almost had a fetish about voter registration. He felt it was the way to win elections, and he directed the Chairman to emphasize always voter registration,” explained Reese.²³⁶ After working in the DNC for several years, in 1966, Reese left and formed a political consulting firm called Matt Reese & Associates which was later renamed Reese Communications Companies. Political scientist Dennis Johnson acknowledged that Reese became a supreme field organizer and a specialist in voter contact.²³⁷

As the Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginians for Kennedy, Matthew Reese put together an astonishing grassroots effort for the Kennedy campaign. Through his efforts he helped ease West Virginian voters’ concerns and fears of the possibility of having a Catholic president. He aided the campaign in winning over labor unions and their workers. He got the endorsements of popular Democrats like Franklin Roosevelt Jr. whose words carried weight in West Virginia because of his father’s popular New Deal policies. Reese’s consulting contributed to Kennedy’s victory.

²³⁶ Reese Jr., interview.

²³⁷ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 103.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NEW FRONTIER

The influence of Matthew Reese and his career in political consulting continues to be felt in the twenty-first century. Reese's adoption of computers and data-collection software such as PRIZM and Claritas led to the increased usage of such tools and programs in the discipline. Reese was among the first political consultants to take the tactics and strategies of elections into the corporate advertising world. Through his mentorship, Reese inspired and trained future generations of political and corporate consultants alike. Additionally, Reese's inclusion of women in his political consulting efforts helped open the once male-dominated field up to women. As political scientist Larry Sabato argued, the rise of political consultants brought new ways of winning elections. Consultants belonging to Reese's pedigree have also furthered the growth of the field by mirroring Reese and adopting even newer practices. As the technology has advanced, these consultants continue to use geodemography with stronger software programs compared to what Reese used in the late 1970s and 1980s.²³⁸

One such example of a political consultant inspired by Reese is Richard S. (Dick) Morris. In the late 1970s, Morris, like Reese, was using polling data to help candidates shape their messages. He was contacted by Arkansas attorney general Bill Clinton's chief of staff, Steve Smith, who asked him to help them determine if Clinton should run for US Senate or the Arkansas governorship. With the data that he pulled Morris concluded that Clinton could beat rivals in the gubernatorial race but would have little chance in the heavily crowded Senate

²³⁸ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 281. Johnson writes that the consultants who emerged in the 1980s and into the early 2000s were instrumental in developing strategy and tactics for campaigns from the 1990s and into the present.

race.²³⁹ The advice prevailed as Clinton was elected governor of Arkansas. Rewarded for his work, Morris worked for the Clintons on and off again up to and including Clinton's time in the White House.²⁴⁰

One of Reese's former associates that became an influential consultant is Walter "Wally" Clinton. Clinton began his work in politics for Reese during Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign. For four years, Clinton worked the telephones for Reese, a common theme throughout Reese's career. Clinton took the telephone work he was doing and founded a political telemarketing firm called the Clinton Group, now known as the American Directions Group (ADG).²⁴¹ The firm, much like Reese's, assorted itself with grassroots advocacy and targeting, the mobilization of volunteers, market research, and campaign communications. It has recruited and mobilized more than two million grassroots activists, made fourteen million survey calls, and worked on thousands of ballot initiatives and political campaigns in all fifty states, Canada, South and Central America, and Europe. Also, like Reese's firm, ADG has worked in both the nonpolitical realm and the business realm.²⁴² The significance of the multimedia, across the spectrum consulting firm shows that the crossover of politics and business grew alongside and after Reese.

The then Clinton Group turned volunteer political calling into a business. Clinton set up call centers specifically for political campaigns. He first made use of this in 1972 when George McGovern ran for president. Like Reese's volunteers, Clinton trained the paid workers to make

²³⁹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 281.

²⁴⁰ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 281-282.

²⁴¹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 202.

²⁴² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 203.

the calls and developed a list of people to call.²⁴³ He also was one of the first to begin using robocalls. The development of the robocall sped up the process in which a campaign could contact their audience. When robocalls were first used in McGovern's campaign they were able to call twenty people an hour. By the late 1990s, thanks to professional phone banks and computerization, Clinton was reaching sixty to seventy people an hour.²⁴⁴

Clinton's professionalization of the grassroots phone banks has become a standard for the industry, an outgrowth of Reese's emphasis on making connections with voters, but also a departure from it. Clinton still embraces Reese's belief that telephone contact is the most effective method of contacting voters. "When we are on the telephone, people talk back to us. That is the real value of the telephone," Clinton argued.²⁴⁵ However, by championing the recorded call, Clinton has moved away from such communications. A robocall is often one ended and pressing buttons on the phone to generate a response lacks the real human experience of talking to one another even if it is effective in gathering meaningful data. Political scientists Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green argue that the value of these person-to-person conversations is still there. Data from the 2000 presidential election found that non-partisan phone banks increased voter turnout among the young people they targeted.²⁴⁶ However, in Gerber's and Green's 2005 study on the relationship between phone calls and increased voter turnout, they found that robocalls are ineffective.²⁴⁷ They discovered that in a 1998 general election in West

²⁴³ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 199.

²⁴⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 200.

²⁴⁵ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 199.

²⁴⁶ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 199.

²⁴⁷ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P Green, "Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2001): 75–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3078786>.

Haven, Connecticut, which involved more than 17,000 registered voters that the robocalls “did not seem to affect voter turnout.” Further tests in Iowa and Michigan also indicated “minimal positive effect.”²⁴⁸ Regarding the effectiveness of robocall, Gerber and Green concluded that they have minimal effect on voter turnout, instead they allow you to contact the maximum number of people.²⁴⁹

The most effective way to still get people out to vote, regardless of the new inventions that allow you to reach a greater number of people, is to make personal connections. This very tactic is what Reese borrowed from Larry O’Brien’s campaign manual. Gerber and Green concluded that people respond warmly when speaking to an actual human, rather than speaking to an automated message. In fact, Gerber and Green cite the 1960 West Virginia Democratic primary as an example of effective political consulting and campaigning.²⁵⁰ Reese’s grassroots operations made personalized telephone calls to West Virginia residents asking for their support or inviting them to a Kennedy campaign event. This led to large turnout at events such as the event in Huntington, West Virginia that had to be closed by the fire marshal due to the overwhelming number of people that arrived. Reese continued to use the personalization of his messages for political campaigns and advertising campaigns. This personalization of messaging provided for the growth of the practice of geodemography.

Geodemography or the targeting of precincts, neighborhoods, or individual blocks with a specific message for the first time linked together the demographics of a region and its geography. This connection between place and demographics birthed organizational techniques

²⁴⁸ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P Green, “Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment.”

²⁴⁹ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P Green, “Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment.”

²⁵⁰ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P Green, “Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment.”

such as cluster targeting, which allowed Reese and others like him to be precise in their messaging. Prior to the utilization of software that was able to compute such data, Reese and his team analyzed precinct-by-precinct behavior in a jurisdiction, identified the precinct's performance, and then punched the data into hand-held calculators to statistically analyze the information that they gathered.²⁵¹ The Clinton Group founder, Walter Clinton, believed that "Matt Reese began the whole theory of targeting."²⁵²

Geodemography has been around informally since the nineteenth century. Chain stores used the technique to evaluate potential new building sites based on the size and social composition of the population around them. While being an innovative use of regional and local data collection, the owners of these chain stores did not use the sophisticated calculation techniques like Reese and his team deployed throughout the 1960s and certainly did not use computers. The actual science of geodemography did not take shape until the early 1970s when Jonathan Robbin, the founder of Claritas, created a software that could compute such data.²⁵³

The science and software used to analyze geodemographic data first appeared with the development of the Claritas Cluster System by Robbin. The system only became possible with the advent of the US ZIP code system. The postal codes had only been in use for a decade when Robbin began using ZIP codes to identify trends within that code's area. He developed the algorithm that he later used in the Claritas system to create the ZIP Quality (ZQ) index. With the ZQ index, Robbin identified forty lifestyle clusters, from most affluent (ZQ1 – Blue Blood

²⁵¹ Alan S. Gerber and Donald P Green, "Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment."

²⁵² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 200.

²⁵³ R. Flowerdew and W. Goldstein, "Geodemographics in Practice: Developments in North America." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 21, no. 5 (May 1989,) 605–616.

Estates) to least affluent (ZQ40 – Public Assistance). With the data from the clusters gathered, Claritas developed the PRIZM (Potential Rating Index by ZIP Markets) system that linked these forty lifestyle clusters to consumer information such as magazine and newspaper subscriptions, buying habits, television and radio ratings, automobile registration and others.²⁵⁴ The development of the PRIZM system and ZQ index was significant as it was the first data cluster of its kind to be done by software.

Mathew Reese was the first political consultant to make formal use of geodemography software. In 1978, the state of Missouri went to the polls to vote on an initiative to make the state a “right-to-work” state. Just three months before the election, the United Labor Committee of Missouri, an organization that opposed the right-to-work measure and protected organized labor and union interests in the state, hired Reese. The organization had received surveys from pollster William Hamilton that indicated labor would lose by a two-to-one margin.²⁵⁵ They wanted Reese’s expertise to reverse the right-to-work initiative’s lead and help organized labor to a victory. At his suggestion, they agreed to use the Claritas system.²⁵⁶ Reese had only just recently received exclusivity rights to the Claritas system.²⁵⁷

Reese used the ZQ index in Missouri. With the data of the resident’s tax bracket and their consumer habits, he was able to identify the hardcore voters and softcore voters and target them with specific messaging. He used a computer to match registered voters lists with the telephone

²⁵⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 198.

²⁵⁵ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 202.

²⁵⁶ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 202.

²⁵⁷ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 202.

directory, after which all voters determined as unpersuadable were purged from the system.²⁵⁸ This left 595,000 voters in the system. Using 24,100 volunteer workers, who were primarily recruited from organized labor, the Reese-led campaign made ten different direct mail contacts with each of these remaining voters.²⁵⁹ Each letter was written in a different manner depending on which cluster it was sent to and the concerns about right-to-work recorded in the surveys conducted previously from that cluster.²⁶⁰ Reese's grassroots volunteers and organized labor also personally visited 360,000 homes and television, radio, and newspaper advertisements. The organizational effort reversed the polls before the election that suggested that the right-to-work initiative would pass. In February 1978, Hamilton's poll concluded that sixty-three percent of Missouri residents favored right-to-work and only thirty percent against it, with seven percent undecided. However, in the election results in November, sixty percent of the state voted against the initiative while forty percent voted in favor of the initiative.²⁶¹

Larry Sabato, a political scientist professor at the University of Virginia, published *The Rise of Political Consultants* in 1981, just a few short years after the initiative in Missouri. Sabato makes two observations regarding the right-to-work campaign conducted by Reese. The first is that there is an "obvious and valuable" link between macro level polling data that identifies the persuadable voter by group and systems like Claritas.²⁶² This has become more relevant as more consulting firms, political and advertising, make use of similar algorithms and

²⁵⁸ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 203.

²⁵⁹ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 203.

²⁶⁰ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 203.

²⁶¹ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 203.

²⁶² Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 202.

data. The systems have become more refined with newer technologies and the advent of the internet. This allows for more methods of organization of the data clusters and an even larger audience for the firm to reach out.

Sabato's second point was that, of the \$2.5 million spent to organize in Missouri, less than fifteen percent were spent on television time and television ads, while fifteen percent was spent on radio and newspaper advertisements.²⁶³ Just shy of thirty percent were spent together on television, radio, and newspaper ads. Even by the campaign spending standards of the late 1970s, Sabato found this lack of spending on traditional advertising shockingly low. It might have been unusual even for the time, but it took decades after this election for television ads to target data clusters as precise as telephone campaigns, mailings and knocking on doors. Forty years later political campaigns could finally target television ads at households in the way that Reese was able to target specific families through grassroots efforts such as mailings, phone calls and home visits.

In 2014 satellite television providers, DirecTV and DISH, released a joint statement that political TV advertisements can target their ads at the household level. The press release states that with the same methodology of direct mail, addressable advertising allows advertisers to reach their desired audience with accuracy.²⁶⁴ The deal allowed political campaigns to expand their reach to more than twenty million homes through meticulous targeting during statewide campaigns. Three households can watch the same show but depending on their location they can receive distinct types of advertisements. For example, if three families tuned to watch *American*

²⁶³ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 203.

²⁶⁴ "DirecTV and Dish Revolutionize Political TV Advertising Landscape with Combined Addressable Advertising Platform Reaching 20+ Million Households," DISH, January 24, 2014, <https://about.dish.com/2014-01-26-DIRECTV-and-DISH-Revolutionize-Political-TV-Advertising-Landscape-with-Combined-Addressable-Advertising-Platform-Reaching-20-Million-Households>.

Idol live, the household in the moderate leaning conservative block would receive a commercial supporting a conservative politician, cause or attacking a liberal politician or cause. The opposite is true for those who live on a moderate leaning liberal block as at the same time they would also receive a political commercial, but for a liberal politician or cause. However, the third household might be in a solid red or solid blue neighborhood, and they will not get either advertisement at that time since they were deemed not to be a persuadable voter.

The personalization of targeted television advertisements is an evolution of Reese's use of geodemography to provide his intended audience with personalized mailings and phone calls. A modern example of this methodology can be seen in the Mentzer Media Services, which is one of the leading political consulting firms in America. They specialize in strategic placement of campaign commercials by purchasing airtime on behalf of its clients, deciding where, when and how often an ad should run.²⁶⁵ According to their website, Mentzer Media has worked on thousands of campaigns in every state, spending over \$1 billion in media buys in its history.²⁶⁶ Johns Hopkins University political science professor Adam Sheingate reasoned that if an average of 5 to 10 percent of commission on the ads that Mentzer Media placed then they have earned between \$50 and \$100 million over the past several election cycles alone.²⁶⁷ Between Republican and Democratic firms, firms spent over \$6 billion in the 2012 election with more than half, around \$3.6 billion, going to firms that specialize in media, direct mail and digital services.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 1.

²⁶⁶ Mentzer Media, February 22, 2022. <http://www.mentzermedia.com/>.

²⁶⁷ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 1.

²⁶⁸ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 1.

While more money is being spent than in the 1970s and 1980s, the type of services that Reese provided are still prevalent today with politicians and parties paying large sums to receive the consulting and services.

The increased usage of digital services also reflects how Reese's use of geodemography has translated into the modern world. For example, in 2020, internet television streaming service, Hulu, announced they developed a tool for smaller companies to target their advertisements and track how well their advertisements are performing. Using the Disney built software, a company can select the start and end dates for the ad campaign, the audience that they are targeting, and their budget. This type of geodemography targeting is crucial in the contemporary landscape as 90 percent of all thirteen to fifty-four-year-olds watch television on a streaming platform.²⁶⁹ The technology that Matthew Reese helped to pioneer in the latter part of the twentieth century has evolved and adapted to the technologies of the twenty-first century.²⁷⁰

Despite the first political consulting firm being co-founded by a woman, Leone Baxter, women traditionally only served in volunteer roles. This was especially common in the mid-twentieth century when the *O'Brien Manual* and Reese's early days stressed that women should be relegated to the phones, making, and sending personal mailings to households. Leadership roles predominately belonged to men. While the restrictive nature of women's participation in campaigns changed little in the 1970s, it did become increasingly common for women to enter paid roles as political consultants throughout the twentieth century. Reese's continued

²⁶⁹ Brianna Gays, "Hulu Ad Manager, a Self-Service Tool for Small and Medium Sized Businesses, Launches Today in Beta," Hulu, July 15, 2020, <https://press.hulu.com/news/2020/07/15/hulu-ad-manager-a-self-service-tool-for-small-and-medium-sized-businesses-launches-today-in-beta/>.

²⁷⁰ Claritas still does business and consulting as of 2022. They still have the PRIZM which has since grown to sixty-eight segments or clusters that define socioeconomic rank. In addition, PRIZM now also have eleven Lifestage Groups, which are based on age, affluence, and the presence of children and fourteen Social Groups which is based on affluence and whether they live in a city, second-tier city, the suburbs, or small towns and rural areas.

employment of women in prominent roles in the campaigns he consulted on played a critical part in elevating women in the field of political consulting. Since the turn of the century, women have increasingly acquired leadership roles in the industry.²⁷¹ In 2004, only 9 percent of American Association of Political Consultants' (AAPC) membership consisted of women. By 2014, 27 percent of the AAPC's membership were made up of women.²⁷²

One of the most prominent women in political consulting began her career under Matthew Reese. Nancy Todd began working with Reese in 1979.²⁷³ Like fellow Reese alum Walter Clinton before her, Todd left Reese's company for her own work and by the early 1990s she worked as a political consultant for the gaming industry. In 1990, she successfully led the campaign to legalize casinos in Mississippi, Indiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and New York.²⁷⁴ She worked on one hundred ninety-six campaigns in forty-two states and six countries and her clients have been elected ninety-eight percent of the time.²⁷⁵ Todd also served as the chairwoman and past president of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Political Consultants and as president and chairwoman of the AAPC.²⁷⁶ She is also the first woman in history to be inducted into the AAPC's Hall of Fame.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 298.

²⁷² Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 298.

²⁷³ "Nancy Todd - Bio," Nancy Todd, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://www.nancytodd.com/bio.htm>.

²⁷⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 297.

²⁷⁵ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 297.

²⁷⁶ Nancy Todd, "Nancy Todd - Bio."

²⁷⁷ Nancy Todd, "Nancy Todd - Bio."

Once he left political consulting, Reese joined the professional advertising business and began working for telecommunications company AT&T. Providing political public relations services and consultation to companies and initiatives became more common throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Alongside AT&T, Reese also worked with Chevron, United Airlines, Blue Cross & Blue Shield, Citicorp, Georgia Power, and McDonnell Douglas.²⁷⁸ The work Reese provided to these clients was similar in nature to the campaigns he ran in the 1960s and 1970s, the difference being, according to Reese, that “the [corporate] clients leave you alone, you have control.”²⁷⁹ Reese relied on grassroots efforts to provide his clients the services they desired. These services ranged from personalized mailing advertisements to telephone blitz campaigns.

An example of these services being used came in his work with AT&T. AT&T hired Reese in the aftermath of the federal government forcing the breakup of its telecommunication monopoly. In the grassroots handbook that Reese prepared for the company, he categorized AT&T as a political target for Congress, a faceless enemy.²⁸⁰ To counter this, Reese prepared a multi-faceted campaign that was designed to identify, educate, persuade, and mobilize the public and leaders on behalf of AT&T’s position. The company wanted to protect their reputation and promote their affordable long-distance calling. To achieve these goals Reese’s company sent 6.2 million direct mail letters to 1.6 million households throughout America regarding AT&T’s position. Personal letters were created and sent to all one hundred United State Senators.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Bart Barnes, “Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71.,”

²⁷⁹ John Houvouras, “The Godfather.”

²⁸⁰ Matthew A. Reese Papers, “Building Grass Roots Book,” Folder A7+7, Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University, Huntington, WV.

²⁸¹ Matthew A. Reese Papers, “Building Grass Roots Book,” Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University

Reese also assembled a volunteer force of 104,784 people to implement his campaign on behalf of AT&T.²⁸² Recipients of the mailings received personalized messages designed to appeal to them. In the American heartland, families received a postcard sized mailing with a photo of the sun setting over the countryside and a caption that reads “we were country...” and on the other side reads “...when country wasn’t cool!”²⁸³ On the other hand, households in more urban areas with a younger population received a postcard that was designed to look like a comic book panel with the same information.

Much like the organization in a political campaign, Reese kept the same organizational structure in his operations for private companies. Block captains remained a key figure in the operation and oversaw making and sending postcards to households on behalf of his clients. Each volunteer received their block captain kit that contained instructions on how and when to perform their duties.²⁸⁴

As more former political consultants transition to corporate consulting, University of Virginia Political Scientist Larry Sabato noticed this trend growing during the 1980s. He wrote that most consulting firms have moved from entirely engaging in political consulting to one-third or two-thirds of their business dealing with corporate consulting.²⁸⁵ Sabato also noted that consulting firms generated more revenue consulting for corporations than they did working for political campaigns and that long term employment was more stable in the private sector.

²⁸² Matthew A. Reese Papers, “Building Grass Roots Book,” Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University.

²⁸³ Matthew A. Reese Papers, “AT&T Mailings,” Folder A7+7, Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University, Huntington, WV.

²⁸⁴ Matthew A. Reese Papers, “AT&T Mailings,” Folder A7+7, Special Collections, University Libraries, Marshall University.

²⁸⁵ Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 55.

Reese continued to increase his consulting efforts in the private sector prior to his retirement but also continued to consult on some political campaigns. Before the right-to-work initiative in 1978, Reese managed a campaign in New York for the tobacco industry that sought to build public support for a cut in the cigarette tax.²⁸⁶ He then consulted with opponents of the tobacco industry a few years later in 1980 in California where he used Claritas to analyze which segments of California voters supported the creation of nonsmoking sections in public places.²⁸⁷ Adam Sheingate, political scientist at Johns Hopkins University, contended that Reese was among the first in the industry to realize how profitable corporate work could be and others in the industry followed his lead.²⁸⁸

This continued merger of political and corporate consulting also allowed the industry to become more consolidated, with larger firms purchasing smaller firms. In 1987, Reese sold his firm, Reese Communications Companies (RCC) and its subsidiary, Targeting Systems, Inc. (TSI) to a British marketing firm, Wire and Plastic Products, Limited (WPP). As one of the first consulting firm mergers, the \$35 million deal stunned Reese. One year before WPP purchased RCC, it purchased the JWT Group Inc., the parent company of J. Walter Thompson Co., what was then the world's fourth-largest advertising agency.²⁸⁹ Five years after Reese sold RCC and TSI, the two companies grew from a combined revenue of \$4.5 million to \$14.4 million and their

²⁸⁶ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 162.

²⁸⁷ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 162.

²⁸⁸ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 162. Dennis Johnson is also in agreement that Reese was one of the first to move away from political consulting and towards the steadier and more profitable corporate consulting work.

²⁸⁹ Walsh, "British Marketing Group Buys 2 Area PR Firms."

profit before taxes grew from \$512,000 to \$3.5 million.²⁹⁰ As of 2022, WPP is the world's largest advertising and public relations company generating \$17 billion in annual revenues and operates more than three hundred-fifty firms in forty-nine countries.²⁹¹

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the horizontal integration of consulting firms continued apace. The third-largest public relations firm in the world, Burson-Marsteller, was acquired by WPP in 2000, along with its parent firm, Young & Rubicam. The two firms provided support for the Clinton Administration prior to being sold.²⁹² Despite initially consulting for only Democratic political candidates, Reese's old firm WCC soon began to take clients from both major political parties. Some examples of WCC consulting for Republican candidates include member of AAPC Hall of Fame, Charlie Black, who worked for President Reagan and for both President George H. W. and George W. Bush.²⁹³ Adam Sheingate suggests that these acquisitions by WPP and its subsidiaries point to a corporate consolidation of political work in the United States.²⁹⁴ This observation is true with firms from both sides of the aisle being owned by a single company. As Sheingate notes, public relations firms and advertising agencies struggled to balance their client's commercial interests with the partisan nature that

²⁹⁰ Walsh, "British Marketing Group Buys 2 Area PR Firms."

²⁹¹ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

²⁹² Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

²⁹³ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

²⁹⁴ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

comes with campaign consulting. However, due to consolidation, it is now possible to have multiple firms, both Democratic and Republican in nature, to be tied to a single company.²⁹⁵

WPP is not alone in this effort at corporate consolidation. WPP is one of four large companies who are consolidating with smaller firms, with the other three being Omnicom Group, The Interpublic Group of Companies, and Publicis Groupe. Together, these four companies own firms across the globe and make up more than half of the industry's revenue in a year.²⁹⁶ Adam Sheingate argues that the corporate consolidation of political consulting represented a new phase in the way campaign tools are used in a broader corporate strategy.²⁹⁷ Burtch Drake, president and chief executive of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, agrees saying that "if you don't own agencies in those other fields, it comes out of your hide," and that conglomerate growth has been "a way to gather advertising assets under one company to make sure you'll keep the client's dollar."²⁹⁸ The consolidation ushered in by Reese's selloff has become required to grow and survive in the field.

For their clients, the services of the Big Four and others provide what Sheingate describes as a one-stop shop.²⁹⁹ WPP chair, Martin Sorrell, says that "WPP can act as a portal to provide a

²⁹⁵ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 191.

²⁹⁶ Stuart Elliott, "Advertising's Big Four: It's Their World Now."

²⁹⁷ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 193.

²⁹⁸ Stuart Elliott, "Advertising's Big Four: It's Their World Now."

²⁹⁹ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 193.

single point of contact and accountability.”³⁰⁰ That train of thought goes back to how Martin explained his services. The clients have access to a service that helps them in every fashion that is desirable at any level. These clients range from anything such as Barack Obama’s presidential campaign to Coca-Cola. Their needs can range from targeting perusable voters to advertising a new product in a test market. Adam Sheingate suggests this development is a bully pulpit of sorts.³⁰¹

Along with the corporate consolidation of consulting firms, over the course of his career, political consultants and their growing influence over American politics became increasingly evident to the public. Larry Sabato’s argues in *The Rise of Political Consultants* that consultants have become even bigger than the politician in some cases. He writes “a candidate’s adaptability to the new techniques of campaigning, not his competence, has become the standard by which he is judged by political professionals.”³⁰² In 1996, President Bill Clinton complained to his consultants that he did not want to read about them in the press and that he was “sick and tired” of consultants becoming famous at his expense.³⁰³ *TIME* magazine ran a cover story about Clinton consultant, Dick Morris. The cover of that issue was a picture of Clinton with a cutout

³⁰⁰ Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 193.

³⁰¹ Bully Pulpit Interactive is a firm that focuses on digital advertising which agrees with Sheingate’s assessment. During the 2012 election, it along with two other firms accounted for two-thirds of all spending by the Obama campaign. On their website they describe themselves as the modern version of the bully pulpit. They add that their political mentality keeps them “fast and lean,” and their corporate experience keeps them on the forefront and allows them to remain innovative.

³⁰² Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*, 337.

³⁰³ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 322.

photo of Morris on his shoulders and a caption that read “the most influential private citizen in America.”³⁰⁴

Another element of Reese’s political legacy is his pioneering work in voter registration and participation. During his time with the Democratic National Committee, Reese oversaw the largest voter registration drive in the nation’s history. He used his preferred method of contact, the telephone, to call millions of potential voters urging them to register to vote. Reese believed that Kennedy won “because of the voter registration drive that happened prior to the general election in 1960.”³⁰⁵ Similar registration drives occurred prior, but none to the scale or with the technology the Reese and the DNC operated with in 1964. Expanding on the work from 1960, Reese oversaw the registration of four million additional voters in the registration drive prior to the 1964 election.³⁰⁶

The legacy of Reese’s voter registration efforts continued into the twenty-first century. During the 2020 presidential election, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook (now Meta), launched a voter registration drive with the goal of registering four million voters.³⁰⁷ The drive was not Facebook’s first, they had a similar large-scale registration campaign such as Rock the Vote in 2016 which registered 1.7 million voters, like that of the telephone blitz by Reese in 1964.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting*, 322.

³⁰⁵ Reese Jr., interview.

³⁰⁶ Bart Barnes, “Matt Reese, Veteran Political Consultant, Dies at 71.”

³⁰⁷ Mark Zuckerberg, “Mark Zuckerberg: Historic Facebook Campaign Will Boost Voter Registration, Turnout and Voices.” USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, June 17, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/06/17/facebook-voter-campaign-strengthen-democracy-mark-zuckerberg-column/3191152001/>.

³⁰⁸ Mark Zuckerberg, “Mark Zuckerberg: Historic Facebook Campaign Will Boost Voter Registration, Turnout and Voices.” Meta’s efforts reached their 2020 goal and registered 4.4 million people across all their applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger. Zuckerberg confirmed it was the largest voting information campaign in American history.

Matthew Reese's legacy is insurmountable. He trained generations of political consultants who are still doing business. His reliance on women workers helped more women to move into leadership roles in the field. The field has also seen an increase of women workers since the twenty-first century began. Additionally, Reese's practices are felt through new consultants as they use similar tactics and methodologies that he used. These practices have been adapted for an increasingly digital world and make use of the technologies that are available to them. However, Reese also changed his methods to work with the tools he had and in doing so he became the first consultant to use data-driven software to use geodemography to better reach his intended audiences with personalized messages. The data on geodemography that is produced from computer software is so effective that television companies and streaming services allow political consultants to target specific households with advertisements through their services. His work in the private sector also inspired an increase in political consultants hired by private companies for their geodemographic services. Reese's efforts saw new ways that political consultants ran campaigns and new ways for them to win.

CONCLUSION

Days after Matthew Reese's passing, the surviving Kennedy brother, Ted, drafted a letter and sent his condolences to Reese's wife, Martha. In the letter, Kennedy expressed his deepest sympathy, and that the Kennedy family were proud of his leadership, grateful for his friendship, and will forever miss him.³⁰⁹ Kennedy also revealed that his brother John held Reese in extremely high regard, especially after his tireless work in the 1960 West Virginia primary. "In a very real sense, Matt helped lay the foundation for the New Frontier," Ted Kennedy wrote, "Jack couldn't have won without him."³¹⁰ In many ways, Matt Reese did help usher in a New Frontier. He helped Kennedy become president, but he also revolutionized political consulting.

The mid twentieth century saw the growth of professional political consulting at a rapid pace. This growth changed how politics were conducted then and shaped how they are conducted today. It also saw private businesses begin employing the same political consultants and tactics to grow their advertising. It is in essence a modern-day bully pulpit. The complexities of the growing and changing field were navigated by Matthew Reese. Recognized for his contributions to the field's early history and development into the multimedia giant that it is today, Reese was heralded as "The Godfather of Modern Political Consulting" by *The Washington Post* upon his death.

The emergence of professional political consulting served as a natural evolution as political parties moved away from machines and party bosses. This evolution can be observed for the first time as a response by Campaigns Inc. to stop Upton Sinclair's bid to be governor of

³⁰⁹ Ted Kennedy (Washington D.C., n.d.).

³¹⁰ Ted Kennedy (Washington D.C., n.d.).

California in the 1930s. However, it was not until the 1960s that other firms other than Campaigns Inc. began to adopt their practices to provide consulting to politicians and campaigns. Matthew Reese was among the first to enter the field as it grew beyond California during this time. The profession reached new heights during this time. It saw the introduction of computer software to spread the grassroots efforts in which Reese was the first professional political consultant to use. The same methods and technologies used when Reese shifted his focus from political consulting to consulting businesses.

Reese began his consulting career in the 1960 West Virginia primary and was heavily influenced by Larry O'Brien's philosophies and carried it with him throughout his career. The primary is one of the most recognizable elections in modern history where John Kennedy defeated Hubert Humphrey and demonstrated to the nation that he can overcome the Catholic issue that surrounded his campaign. It also displayed that Reese's contributions to the campaign were crucial in propelling Kennedy to victory. Reese was hired onto a high-ranking position in the state's campaign leadership, the Executive Director of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia. Reese employed the philosophies of the *O'Brien Manual* in West Virginia, starting grassroots tactics he regularly made use of throughout his career. He helped Kennedy secure the nominations of high-profile Democratic leaders, an issue that the Kennedy campaign faced in the buildup to the 1960 election. He organized campaign events and assisted in defusing the issue with Kennedy's religion. The work in West Virginia landed him a job at the Democratic National Committee, which spring boarded him into his political consulting career.

When Reese began his career, he was still computing information by calculator and hand and by the time he retired, he was the first to harness computer software that streamlined the work and made it more accurate. With computer software he was able to enhance

geodemography, the linking of demographics and geography to better present his message. At the same time, he also led the industry into the private sector by being the first to supply his services to private companies. Additionally, when he sold his firm to Wire and Plastic Products (WPP) he was one the earliest in the industry to sell their firm to a much larger conglomerate. The acquisitions of firms into much larger companies to gobble up their services as a one stop shop for everything has become common during the twilight of the twentieth century and throughout the twentieth-first century.

This new and current stage of political operations relies heavily on the practices established by political consultants in the mid twentieth century. In the Digital Age, people are more accessible thanks to the advent of social media and smart devices that keep them in touch with the world around them. This makes the use of geodemography even more prevalent since data pulled from one's digital footprint makes them an easier target for consulting companies. The continued use of systems such as the PRIZM (Potential Rating Index by ZIP Markets) index and Claritas shows their effectiveness and that their use is like how it operated in the 1970s when used by Reese. Companies such as DirecTV and DISH provide services that let consultants and campaigns emulate the geodemography methods of targeting their intended audience, much like Reese targeted undecided voters with specific messages. The ability for a consulting or advertising firm to reach its intended audience has never been easier.

The accessibility of one and their data and by big marketing and consulting firms can be worrisome. Scholars Larry Sabato and Adam Sheingate both recognized the trouble it can cause with ethics and raises concerns of corruption.³¹¹ The goal of such firms is to make as much

³¹¹ See Larry Sabato's *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections* and Adam Sheingate's *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*.

money as possible. More money is used on advertising and political campaigns now than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite these concerns, more money will continue to be spent on consulting and as Sheingate duly notes that across the political spectrum and all levels of government, few candidates try for office without the services of a professional political consultant and even fewer succeed without one.³¹²

Scholarship exists on political consulting, but no such scholarship examined Reese's legacy on the profession. Such scholarship is necessary because it provides the context for a business that impacts everyday life and is heavily involved in politics and business. It is now a necessity for a business planning to advertise to hire professional consultants or a politician running a campaign to also hire professional consultants. Several of these consultants are alumni of Reese's firms and follow him in their work. As a result, this scholarship helps to close the gap that existed in the history of political consulting.

³¹² Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy*, 200.

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APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL LETTER



Office of Research Integrity

March 28, 2022

Ethan Tackett
Operations Coordinator
Office of Academic Affairs

Dear Ethan:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*The Godfather of Modern Political Consulting: Matthew Reese.*" After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bruce F. Day'.

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

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