



## CONVENTIONS FOR THE UNCONVENTIONAL

Minor Party Conventions, 1992-2004

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PARTY CONVENTIONS ARE USUALLY thought to serve a number of important functions. Officially, they choose candidates, determine platforms, set the party's rules, and elect the officers who will govern the party until its next convention. Unofficial functions are at least as important. Conventions can help bring contending factions together, inspire party activists to work hard on the campaign, and provide a way for the party to present itself to the public.<sup>1</sup>

For the major parties, only the unofficial functions retain their importance. For the last few decades, every major party nominee has won a majority of delegates before the convention and has then exercised nearly total control over the platform, the rules, and the choice of chair for the party's national committee.<sup>2</sup> Major party conventions have become pep rallies, designed to make the nominee look good on television and thereby earn a "convention bounce" in the polls. Paradoxically, this design had made the resulting conventions so devoid of real news content that the commercial television networks no longer provide gavel-to-gavel coverage.

Minor party conventions are another story. Despite the poor chances of the nominee's being elected, minor party nominations are frequently contested. In 2004, for example, the Green and Libertarian parties had nomination contests at their conventions. Minor party conventions also set the rules, determine the platforms, and choose the leaders for the party; in fact, the last function can be more important, as the nominee will probably lose but the leaders will continue to direct the party. Conventions also help give minor parties cohesion; they provide one of the few opportunities for party activists from different regions to get to know each other. Since minor party conventions generally receive little or no coverage on television or in other mass media, they can fulfill these functions (or fail to fulfill them) without the distortions induced

by media pressure. The role of conventions in the development of the Green Party of the United States exemplifies the performance of these functions.

The Green Party conventions of 2000 and 2004 illustrate the Greens' development into an electoral party, a status that had not always been clear. When the U.S. Greens began, they were more movement than party, and their conventions, or rather "gatherings," made no nominations, determined no platforms (although they did agree on "ten key values," which have remained the center of the Green program), and decided only organizational questions—and those with considerable difficulty. These early conventions drew virtually no media attention. The Green conventions took on a more conventional form only after the party had begun to run candidates for president, a strategy adopted initially without a normal convention. The intervening years were marked by small conventions, often stalemated, in which feelings grew hot and eventually led to the splitting of the Greens into two competing national organizations.

### BEGINNINGS OF THE U.S. GREENS

The U.S. Greens began in May 1984, when the success of Green parties in other countries, most visibly in Germany, inspired a group of ecological activists to meet as part of the North American Bioregional Congress and talk about "how to create a Green organization that could reflect the tremendous political and cultural diversity of this country, and also have a real impact upon the strange and often unseemly world of American politics." A follow-up meeting in St. Paul decided that it would be premature to launch a Green party until a grassroots base was developed; instead the meeting founded the "Committees of Correspondence, after the locally-based alliances of people from Maine to Georgia that helped to spark the American Revolution."<sup>3</sup> A Green clearing-house was established, and the meeting adopted the "Ten Key Values" as the basis of unity for the U.S. Green movement.

The Ten Key Values (10KV) are most commonly given as "ecological wisdom, social justice, grassroots democracy, non-violence, decentralization, community-based economics, feminism, respect for diversity, personal and global responsibility, and future focus."<sup>4</sup> Some Greens have considered "feminism" to be ambiguous, or have doubted whether men can be feminists, and have replaced it with "post-patriarchal values"; the Green Party of the United States has expanded it to "feminism and gender equity."<sup>5</sup> The 10KV, which continue to be cited today, are meant to give the Greens a common philosophical basis, while leaving state and local organizations free to adopt their indi-

vidual programs in accordance with the call for decentralization. The Greens believe that this philosophical basis makes them different from other parties. Accordingly, as John Rensenbrink observes, "self-study . . . is often the favored initial activity of most [Green] groups. Once sufficiently familiar with the roots and scope of the Green movement and Green vision, and once feeling sufficiently comfortable with one another, groups will take on one or more . . . other types of action."<sup>6</sup>

In the early years the Greens came together every year in a "Green Gathering." As the movement began to grow, there was considerable discussion about how a grassroots movement could maintain democracy at the national level, and two principles were adopted. In order to keep the organization committed and activist, membership would be defined as consisting of those who declared their adherence to Green values and who paid dues to the national organization. In order to prevent those who could afford to travel to national meetings from having disproportionate influence, members who did not attend those meetings could be represented by giving their proxies to designated representatives.

By the early 1990s, internal disagreements among the Greens had led to the growth of two loosely organized factions. These groupings took on various names over time, and there were many Greens who did not fit easily into either of them; so what follows is a simplification. The Left Greens were concerned to maintain a consistently progressive Green point of view which would combine a commitment to opposing racism, sexism, and homophobia and to supporting the working class with the characteristic Green environmental program. In order to maintain such consistency, they felt that it was important for new members to join the Greens only as a conscious choice, based on agreement with the Green program. The requirement that members pay dues—which were never very high—was meant to assure that such choices were meaningful. Left Greens also tended to think that nonelectoral organizing and protest were equally important as electoral campaigns, and that the latter without the former would quickly corrupt the Greens into a party just like the others. Their local orientation and commitment to including low-income members led to the adoption of proxy voting, seen as a way to keep national Green decision making from being dominated by lone activists who were able to travel to meetings but did not necessarily represent anyone but themselves.

The other major grouping, known at one time as the Green Politics Network (GPN), was defined by its commitment to running Greens for office. Members of this group were not necessarily less left than the Left Greens in

their political views nor less convinced of the value of nonelectoral movement organizing, but they did tend to feel that there were already many organizations doing such organizing, and that the major contribution the Greens could make to the broader movement was to provide a voice for movement issues within the system of campaigns and elections. Consequently, this group paid more attention to the practicalities of electoral campaigns and to the need to comply with state and federal laws regulating such campaigns. Among other things, laws in many states required parties to have a statewide governing body and to open party membership to all voters who registered with the party. Left Greens objected to the latter, which posed the danger that the party could be taken over by those who did not share its aims, and state party organizations simply had no place in the existing Green national structure, which allowed only for locals and individuals as members.<sup>7</sup> Some GPN activists proposed changes in the bylaws to meet those concerns, but those changes were voted down—sometimes by a handful of people who each held many proxy votes. Rightly or wrongly, GPN activists began to suspect that these proxies might not represent actual members, and that the system was rigged against them.<sup>8</sup>

Frustrated by the national Green Party structure, leaders of a few state parties began to meet on their own, with no official link to the GPN, to discuss mutual problems and possible strategies. Since they were interested in electoral action, the idea of a Green presidential campaign came up. Various candidates were suggested and sounded out, and one of these, Ralph Nader, indicated that he would be willing to accept a Green nomination. At the same time, Nader insisted on some specific conditions. First, because he was deeply involved with many nonprofit organizations that he had founded over the years and did not want to subject those organizations' finances to scrutiny from the Federal Election Commission (FEC), he would raise and spend no more than \$4,000 on his campaign, the level that would trigger FEC reporting requirements; individual state Green parties would have to raise and spend funds for his campaign independently. Second, he would not become a member, however that might be defined, of the Green Party.

Although these restrictions would hurt, those Greens who supported Nader thought that he would be a very strong candidate. Nader had been a consumer rights leader for more than thirty years, during which time he had fought and won battles with major automobile companies.<sup>9</sup> He had helped to create a new type of progressive entity, the public-interest law firm, and had founded several organizations, from Washington think tanks to the network of campus-based Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs). He also had high

visibility with a reputation for personal integrity. Many Greens thought that the visibility Nader would bring would compensate for his hands-off approach to the campaign; some even justified his approach, arguing that asking local activists to do the bulk of campaigning was in keeping with the Greens' spirit of local action.

Many aspects of a Nader campaign were controversial within the Green movement. Nader was not a Green and did not intend to become one; he did not share the Greens' commitment to combating racism, sexism, and homophobia; and many thought a presidential campaign would take too much money and energy away from organizing at the local level.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there was no existing mechanism for nominating a Green presidential candidate. Anticipating bitter debate and another losing proxy battle if they took the issue to a national Greens Gathering, Nader's backers hit upon a novel approach. They would seek to nominate Nader as the presidential candidate of the Green Party of California. This would put him on the ballot of only one state, but it would also compel all other state Green parties to face the question of whether they, too, should nominate him. Nader entered and won the California Green primary in March, as well as primaries in a few other states with recognized Green parties. Then, with his candidacy an established fact, Mike Feinstein of the California Green Party (and an elected official in Santa Monica) invited Greens to an ad hoc gathering in Los Angeles in August. This conference, *not* an official meeting of the Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA, combined four days of workshops and speeches with a presidential nominating convention on the fifth day. By August 19, the day the convention nominated him, Nader had already qualified for the ballot in twelve states.<sup>11</sup>

In 1996 Nader appeared on the ballot in twenty-one states, and qualified as a write-in in twenty-three more. He received 685,297 votes for president, 0.97% of the total, finishing a distant fourth; needless to say, he won no electoral votes.<sup>12</sup> Although these figures might suggest that the campaign was a miserable failure, it did not look way from the Green point of view. The purpose of the campaign had not been to win but to build the Green party; and the party had grown significantly in members and in geographic coverage. Shortly after the election, thirty-one state Green parties sent representatives to a meeting in Middleburg, Virginia, at which a new national organization, the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) was founded. The ASGP, in some ways a successor to the GPN, was to become the vehicle for a second, more energetic Nader presidential campaign in the year 2000.

The ASGP held its first and only presidential nominating convention in Denver, Colorado, from June 23 to June 25, 2000. Forty state Green Parties were officially represented, with 375 delegate votes, allocated according to a formula that measured membership and Green Party state-level activity. At the opening session, 315 of these delegates were present, with more arriving during the course of the convention; proxy voting was not allowed.

Only a few state Green Parties, such as that of California, had the right to take part in their state's presidential primaries; most of the delegates had been chosen in party conventions. Procedures in Massachusetts were typical: all members who had registered as Greens were invited to the convention at the Friends Meeting House in Cambridge on March 25, and eighty-five attended. Two separate votes were taken, one to elect delegates and one to indicate preferences for the announced candidates for the Green nomination. In addition to Nader, two other candidates were running: Jello Biafra, an entertainer who had first become widely known as a member of the rock band the Dead Kennedys and had gone on to a solo career as a spoken-word performer; and Stephen Gaskin, the founder of a long-established agricultural commune and leader of the commune movement nationally. Joel Kovel, an author and professor at Bard College, had withdrawn his candidacy by the time of the Massachusetts convention. Delegates were chosen primarily for their willingness to travel to Denver at their own expense, but they were mandated to divide their ballots in the proportions of the preferences voted at the state convention—eleven votes for Nader and one for Biafra.<sup>13</sup>

In 2000, for the first time, Green leaders planned their party's convention with the broadcast media in mind. As a result, despite some oddities—to help keep business flowing on schedule, delegates were urged to "twinkle" their fingers in the air instead of applauding, and there was more emphasis on the legalization of industrial hemp than one would have found at the Democratic and Republican counterparts—the meeting was much more like a major party convention than like a typical gathering of the left. The speakers list emphasized representatives of international Green parties and leading figures from American political life, including John Anderson, a former member of Congress (R-IL) who had run a strong independent campaign in 1980; Ronnie Dugger, founder and leader of the Alliance for Democracy; Jim Hightower, former agricultural commissioner of Texas (an elected office), who was now supporting Nader; and Doris "Granny D" Haddock, a ninety-year old woman who had gained fame by walking across America in support of campaign finance reform. Tony Mazzochi of the Labor Party (which did not endorse can-

didates in principle) and Don Torgerson of the American Reform Party (the faction of the Reform Party that had supported Richard Lamm in 1996 and quit in protest over Ross Perot's tight control of the party) spoke in support of Nader. Many Green candidates for state and federal office spoke as well.

Aware of Greens' propensity to debate endlessly the fine points of issues, the convention organizers did away with the issue workshops traditional at movement meetings—the only workshops were campaign training sessions run by the Nader campaign organization in a separate hotel. Debate on the platform was limited to a yes-or-no vote.

The highlight of the convention, of course, was the balloting for president on the afternoon of June 25. It was clear that Nader would win, but each of the other declared candidates—including Kovel—spoke before the vote. Making it clear that they had run primarily in order to bring new constituencies into the Green Party and the presidential campaign, they all endorsed Nader. Nader did not speak for himself but had his name placed in nomination by Hightower. The result of the balloting, never in doubt, was 293 votes for Nader, 10 for Biafra, 10 for Gaskin, and 1 for “none of the above.”

Ronnie Dugger then introduced Nader for his acceptance speech, which was broadcast on C-SPAN and covered in the *New York Times* and other newspapers.<sup>14</sup> The candidate was received with great enthusiasm—with the TV cameras rolling, most Greens realized that applause would come across better than “twinkling”—as he laid out the major theme of his campaign, the need to restore American democracy by taking power back from the corporations. He argued that conservatives as well as liberals should want this, that America needed to change direction—referring to “Granny D,” he bemoaned the new reality that, in order to be heard, the average citizen needed to walk across America. Perhaps aware of some Greens' concern that he was too centrist, he also touched on a variety of issues dear to the left, including industrial hemp.

Despite the hemp, the twinkling, and the occasional tie-dyed shirt, the Green convention of 2000 was made for television, and resembled recent major party conventions in other ways. The nomination was settled beforehand, the platform was molded to suit the needs of the campaign, and—since the ASGP was a federation of state parties—there were not party leadership issues to be decided. It fell into the category of “non deliberative events that ratify decisions already made.”<sup>15</sup>

The Green Party gained visibility from the convention coverage, and, while Nader was well known already, the convention made more people aware that he was the Green candidate. However, this new visibility was not sufficient to

affect the campaign strategy of the major parties. The Democrats and the Gore campaign, in particular, continued to ignore Nader and the Greens until much later in the campaign, as discussed below.

The professional tone set by the convention continued as the campaign began.<sup>16</sup> Although state and local Green parties joined in enthusiastically, the campaign was run by the Nader 2000 staff, which raised money, organized rallies, and printed literature. To the extent that funds allowed, state campaign coordinators were on the Nader 2000 payroll. William Hillsman, one of the architects of Jesse Ventura's Reform Party victory in Minnesota, was retained as a media consultant and made a quick impact when his ad parodying a credit card commercial, broadcast during the major party conventions, provoked a copyright infringement suit.

Although the campaign budget was far more than Greens were accustomed to, it was far from adequate for a modern national campaign. There was little television advertising and considerable emphasis on grassroots mobilization and free media. Nader used his unsuccessful demand for participation in the debates to garner press coverage—in Boston, for example, he obtained a ticket to watch the debates, got a television news crew to film him as he traveled to the site on the subway, and then got more press by suing the debate commission after he was excluded from the audience.

Large rallies in major cities were the most important campaign activities. By amassing paying crowds of ten thousand or more the campaign generated local press and demonstrated that Nader had significant popular support.

By mid-October polls showed support for Nader at 7 to 8 percent in California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, 10 percent in Minnesota and Oregon, and 17 percent in Alaska. California and Alaska were not competitive, but in the other states—and in Washington and Wisconsin—the Gore campaign's strategists began to worry that Nader might win enough votes away from Gore to tip some states, and perhaps the election, to Bush.<sup>17</sup> The Gore campaign, which had been trying to ignore Nader, now struck back. Gore proclaimed his commitment to environmentalism while arguing that a vote for Nader would help elect Bush, and a group of major environmental organizations repeated the argument. Regular stories about Nader—albeit negative ones—began to appear in the election coverage of the *New York Times* for the first time since the Green convention at the end of June.<sup>18</sup>

While Gore was attacking Nader, Nader was targeting Gore, having made the strategic decision to campaign hardest in the swing states, including Florida, during the last few weeks before the election.<sup>19</sup> This decision may have

been driven by a desire to maximize Nader's votes, rather than to hurt Gore, but understandably, this decision was not popular with Democrats.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless the decision helped establish the Green party as an electoral force to be reckoned with. Ultimately, Nader got 2,882,782 votes, 2.74% of the total, finishing third—well ahead of Buchanan with 0.43%, but far behind the 50 million vote totals of Bush and Gore.<sup>21</sup> Nader also fell far short of the 5 percent cutoff needed to qualify the Greens for FEC general election matching funds in 2004. Most importantly, perhaps, Nader's active campaign in Florida won enough votes to change the outcome in that state, and nationally, from a Gore to a Bush victory.

Although the Nader campaign did not qualify for FEC general election matching funds, it did achieve several other important Green objectives. The Green Party reached a new level of success as a result of the 2000 campaign. Eight new state Green Parties grew out of the campaign, bringing the national total to thirty-four; party registration increased 63%, to 194,000; and the numbers of Green candidates for state and local office, and the numbers of such candidates who were elected, rose by the highest proportion since 1992.

The 2000 Nader campaign also brought an effective end to the bitter factional dispute that had plagued the Greens for at least five years. Both of the factions, the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) and the Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA) nominated Nader, but the ASGP was clearly the main campaign vehicle. After the election a group of leading members from both sides of the dispute drew up a compromise unity plan, which was adopted by the ASGP. When the G/GPUSA was unable to approve the plan (because of its proxy-voting system, which gave a handful of members a majority of the votes), that organization split, with most members going over to the pro-unity side. The ASGP then proceeded unilaterally to transform itself into the Green Party of the United States (GPUS), while its rival has been pushed to the margins of political life.<sup>22</sup>

The Green Party continued to grow through the next few years, running active campaigns and, most notably, almost electing the mayor of San Francisco. It entered the 2004 campaign season with the strongest organization it had ever had, but it faced two problems: Ralph Nader and George W. Bush.<sup>23</sup>

Tensions between the party and Nader went back to the 2000 campaign. Nader and his personal staff had been highly critical of Green Party organizational efforts during the 2000 campaign. In a postelection analysis of Nader's failure to get 5 percent of the vote, Micah Sifry cites several criticisms of the Greens by "a close Nader advisor." "The Green nominating convention was too

early to let the candidate maximize federal "primary season" matching funds, Greens cared more about state and local elections than the presidential campaign, Greens failed to organize for the mammoth rallies, and in October the ASGP issued a statement calling for the suspension of U.S. aid to Israel until it withdrew from the occupied territories, a position Nader did not share.<sup>24</sup>

From the other side, John Rensenbrink lists several Green grievances with Nader at the end of 2003. "His personal style is too aloof; he does not involve the party in his strategy planning; he is unilateral and mercurial in his actions; he is not a Green; he is in danger of becoming a 'perennial candidate'; his message is that of 'a one-noter' (the anti-corporate mantra); and . . . the net effect of these and other factors is a drag on the Green Party."<sup>25</sup> A further grievance was that Nader had refused to give the Green Party a list of those who had contributed to his campaign fund until two years after the election. Given these grievances and misunderstandings, the Greens were divided as to the desirability of nominating Nader again in 2004.

The Greens' second problem was George W. Bush and his remarkable ability to polarize American public opinion. When they were criticized by Democrats in 2000 for having cost Gore the election, Greens bore the criticism with equanimity, pointing to Gore's ineffective campaign, his inability to carry either his own state or President Clinton's, and the chicanery of the Supreme Court majority as the real reasons Gore lost. However, following Bush's declaration of the "War on Terror," and particularly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Greens began to feel the pressure of "Anyone But Bush."

Sometime in late 2003, Nader began to let it be known that he intended to run for president again, but this time not as a Green. As Ted Glick put it in his syndicated "Future Hope" column: "By all reports, he [Nader] is upset with the criticism that some former strong Nader supporters in the Greens have made of him, and he believes that the Greens aren't growing fast enough. He is reportedly saying that he does not want to announce as a possible Green Party candidate, raise lots of money and put in lots of energy and then, at the nominating convention in late June in Milwaukee, not be chosen as the candidate, or see the party decide upon a particular strategy for whomever is its Presidential candidate that he would have to abide by if chosen."<sup>26</sup>

Nader commented elsewhere that the Green convention was scheduled "too late" for him to run an effective campaign, but it is difficult to regard this as a serious point, since one of his complaints in 2000 had been that the Green convention was too early.<sup>27</sup> In any case, candidates customarily begin their campaigns well before the conventions at which they seek nomination.

Presumably Nader's real concern was that he might seek the Green nomination but have it denied to him.

Nader formally announced his independent candidacy on February 22, 2004. Although he did not participate in the Green Party's delegate selection process or enter any Green primaries, he made it clear that he would still like the Green Party to draft him, and ultimately worked with Lorna Salzman, a declared candidate who ran, in effect, as Nader's proxy. Meanwhile, Nader sought and won the nomination of the Reform Party and various single-state parties, while gathering signatures for independent ballot lines.

Nader's decision raises two questions about his motives: Why did he run? And why did he choose not to run as a Green? The first of these looms much larger within the United States than it does in other countries; the general attitude outside the United States seems to be that the voters are perfectly capable of making strategic decisions for themselves, so that if they chose to vote for a "lesser evil" in order to stop Bush, they would do so. However, in the United States the prevailing assumption among political activists is that voters are not capable of rational thought; it is therefore up to the parties and candidates to structure the strategic situation appropriately. Thus there was a "Ralph, Don't Run" movement among left liberals, including many who had supported Nader's candidacy in 2000. Nader's response to this group was that his campaign would energize new constituencies and ultimately help the Democrats defeat Bush.

As for Nader's decision not to seek the Green nomination, two explanations seem plausible. Either he thought it would be humiliating to undergo the Green Party's process of internal decision making, which would have required him to enter primaries, debate other candidates, and subject himself to the oversight of party decision makers; or he wanted to run without the ideological baggage of the Green label.<sup>28</sup> The latter seems more likely. Nader had always argued that small-town conservatives—the kind of people who organize to keep Wal-Mart out of their towns—should support his anti-monopoly agenda, and he seems to have believed that dropping the Green label, not to mention adding Reform, would help him with such voters. He must surely have realized that, had he entered Green primaries, in which many more people than the Green hard core could have voted, he would have won. So his shunning of the Green nomination is probably best understood as an attempt—largely unsuccessful—to shed his reputation as a leftist.

Whatever his motives may have been, Nader's decision to avoid the Green Party's delegate selection process made him ineligible for the party's nomina-

tion. However, the party could still endorse him, a decision which would leave state Green Parties free to offer him their ballot line or not, as they chose. By June 24, when the Green national convention met in Milwaukee, the Nader campaign was fighting for ballot access in many states, and the twenty-three states in which Green Parties existed would have given it an important boost. Nader did not attend the convention but announced on June 21 that Peter Camejo of California would be his running mate. Camejo was a leader of the California Greens and had been the party's candidate for governor during the Davis recall election, finishing third with about 3 percent of the vote. Camejo served as the leader of the Nader forces at the convention.

The leading candidate in the race for delegates was David Cobb, an attorney and long-time Green activist from Texas who had recently relocated to California and had run for attorney general in that state. Cobb was an effective campaigner in person but was little known to the general public. He promised to campaign hard and effectively but to concentrate on states where the two-party contest was not in doubt, in what became known as a "safe states" strategy. Coming into the convention Cobb had about 33 percent of the delegates; Camejo, Lorna Salzman, Carol Miller, and Paul Glover, each of whom had run as a Nader proxy in one or more states, had about 28 percent; 23 percent were uncommitted, 12 percent supported no nomination, and the remaining few percent were for Kent Mesplay. Following a Cobb-Camejo debate and the adoption of the platform, the balloting for the nomination began the morning of Saturday, June 26. In the first round, with most delegates pledged to a candidate, Cobb led with 308 votes, Camejo had 119, Nader 117, no nominee 109, Salzman 40, Mesplay 24, and others received a handful of votes. In the second round, delegates were free to vote as they wished, and candidates were required to sign a pledge to accept the nomination if they won—a step only Cobb, Mesplay, and Joann Beeman, a "favorite daughter" candidate from Michigan, did. The Nader forces asked delegates to vote for no nomination; if that position won a majority, the convention could then move to endorse Nader or, perhaps, in a compromise suggested by Camejo, both Nader and Cobb, leaving it up to each state Green Party to decide whose name should be placed on the ballot in that state. Cobb needed an additional seventy-seven votes and got them when the roll call reached Virginia, making him the Green nominee.<sup>29</sup>

Cobb won for a combination of reasons. On one hand, the "Anybody but Bush" sentiment was shared by many Greens, who did not want potential allies to see them as saboteurs. Cobb's "safe states" strategy appealed to this group; in

reality, with the unknown Cobb as the party's standard bearer no such strategy was needed, as he was unlikely to get enough votes to affect the outcome no matter how vigorously he campaigned.

On the other hand, many who might have supported Nader felt insulted by his decision to avoid the primaries and his failure to appear at the convention. These decisions by Nader reinforced the bad feelings coming out of the 2000 campaign, leading many to feel that it was time for a Green candidate who was actually Green. Had Nader appeared at the convention, he would have gained many of these votes, perhaps enough to win the nomination. Had he run in the primaries, open to the broader public, he might well have come to the convention with the nomination sewed up in advance.

Because the Green nomination had still been in doubt when it began, the 2004 Green convention was *not* made for TV. Good coverage was still desirable, but that desirability was overridden by the need to make the contending groups within the party feel that the decision had been fair. As a result, the GPUS had restored the nominating convention to its historic functions: nominating a candidate for president and setting the party's political direction for the next four years.

Cobb's nomination was the main story of the convention for Green Party members; however, for the major parties and the national media it was that Nader had been denied that nomination. Once that happened, Cobb and the Greens disappeared from view. The Democrats continued to attack Nader but ignored the Greens. It might thus be said that the convention's only impact on the major parties came from what it did *not* do.

The healthy competition at the convention did not lead to a healthy campaign; in fact, the 2004 election was a fiasco for the Greens. The party's presidential candidate in 2000, Ralph Nader, was a well-known and widely respected national figure. He appeared on forty-four state ballots (including the District of Columbia), and received about 2,883,105 votes, finishing third. The Green candidate in 2004, David Cobb, was little known outside the Green party. He appeared on twenty-eight state ballots, and received 119,751 votes, finishing sixth. The party lost its ballot status in a number of states.

Do the U.S. Greens have a future? If so, it probably does not lie in presidential politics. The polarizing effect of George W. Bush seems certain to persist through the 2008 election, leaving little room for a Green alternative. However, the Greens continue to be active in state and local politics. Their first state legislator, John Eder of Maine, was reelected in 2004; a retiring Green on

the San Francisco Board of Supervisors was replaced by another Green, Ross Mirkarimi; and the Greens kept their control of the village of New Paltz, New York, and the city of Sebastopol, California. The Greens' presidential candidate, David Cobb, has been playing a leading role in the postelection campaign to defend the right to vote and to have one's vote counted in Ohio and elsewhere. Perhaps the next evolutionary step for the Green national convention will be to move from being a place where nominees are selected to a gathering that sets the party's strategic direction.

## NOTES

1. Terri Susan Fine, "Presidential Nominating Conventions in a Democracy," *Perspectives on Political Science* 32, no. 1 (winter 2003): 32-39.
2. Fine, "Presidential Nominating Conventions," 32.
3. Brian Tokar, *The Green Alternative: Creating an Ecological Future* (San Pedro, Calif.: R. and E. Miles, 1992), 52. Confusingly, another unrelated organization with the same name was started at about the same time by former members of the Communist Party USA who wanted to promote socialist politics while leaving its Stalinist heritage behind.
4. See, e.g., "The Ten Key Values of the Greens" at [www.greens.org/values/](http://www.greens.org/values/) (accessed June 11, 2004).
5. Green Party of the United States, "Ten Key Values of the Green Party," [www.gp.org/tenkey.html](http://www.gp.org/tenkey.html) (accessed June 11, 2004).
6. John Rensenbrink, *Against All Odds: The Green Transformation of American Politics*, foreword by Ralph Nader (Raymond, ME: Leopold Press, 1999), 111-12.
7. This was not a paranoid fantasy. The lack of control parties have over their memberships enabled the controversial disk jockey Howard Stern to win the Libertarian nomination for governor of New York in 1994. Stern ran as a publicity stunt; he used his radio show to mobilize supporters to attend the Libertarian state convention and renounced the nomination a week after he had won it. See Kevin Sack, "Eyes Wide, Libertarians Pick Stern," *New York Times*, April 24, 1994, pp. 20, 40; "The Stern Gang," *New Yorker*, May 9, 1994, pp. 39-40. The more serious danger is shown in Patrick Buchanan's successful quest for the Reform Party presidential nomination in 2000; Buchanan's views on everything but free trade differed radically from those of most Reform activists, and many felt that his only goal was to win control of the \$13 million in federal campaign funds that the party had qualified for by Ross Perot's performance in 1996.
8. See Rensenbrink, *Against All Odds*, for a full account of this conflict from the GPN perspective; for a view from the other side, see Howie Hawkins, "Individual Members: The Grassroots of Green Party Democracy," *Synthesis/Regeneration* 14 (fall 1997), available at [www.greens.org/s-r/14/14-02.html](http://www.greens.org/s-r/14/14-02.html) (accessed June 11, 2004); Howie Hawkins, "Green Parties: Still Seeking Unity," *Z Magazine* 10, no. 3 (March 1997): 21-24.
9. Ralph Nader, *Unafraid at any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* (New York: Grossman, 1965); Thomas Whiteside, *The Investigation of Ralph Nader: General Motors vs. One Determined Man* (New York: Athor House, 1972); Charles McCarry, *Citizen*

*Nader* (New York: Saturday Review, 1972); Justin Martin, *Nader: Crusader, Spoiler, Icon* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002); Patricia Cronin Marcello, *Ralph Nader: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004).

10. He had told interviewer William Safire that he was "not interested in gonadal politics," (*New York Times*, March 21, 1996).

11. Walt Contreras Sheasby, "To Build a Party: Ralph Nader and the Green Candidacy," 1996, newsgroup posting, Grns.usa.forum (accessed June 6, 2004). Also see Rensenbrink, *Against All Odds*, 207-9.

12. Dave Leip, "Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections," [www.uselectionatlas.org](http://www.uselectionatlas.org) (accessed June 6, 2004).

13. In the event, one of the twelve Massachusetts delegates did not attend the national convention. The delegation caucused in Denver and agreed that the mandated vote for Biafra would be cast by Jon Leavitt, co-chair of the state party.

14. See, e.g., Michael Jannfsky, "Nader, Nominated by the Greens, Attacks Politics as Usual," *New York Times*, June 26, 2000.

15. Fine, "Presidential Nominating Conventions," 32.

16. Material for the next five paragraphs is adapted from John C. Berg, "Spoiler or Builder? The Effect of Ralph Nader's 2000 Campaign on the U.S. Greens," in *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, ed. John C. Green and Rick D. Farmer (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). See also Micah L. Sifry, *Spoiling for a Fight: Third Party Politics in America* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and Ralph Nader, *Crashing the Party: Taking on the Corporate Government in an Age of Surrender* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2002).

17. Micah L. Sifry, "Nader's No Ventura, But . . ." *NewsForChange.Com*, October 31, 2000.

18. John Nichols, "Nader: Fast in the Stretch," *Nation*, November 20, 2000.

19. *Ibid.*

20. See Barry C. Burden, "Ralph Nader's Campaign Strategy in the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 4-7, 2003.

21. Reported in *Ballot Access News* 16, no. 10 (January 1, 2001).

22. John Rensenbrink, "Challenge and Response: The Emergence of the Green Party in the United States," *Green Horizon Quarterly*, Feb. 2003.

23. Material for the remainder of this chapter is adapted from John C. Berg, "Surviving Nader? The Future of the U.S. Greens," paper presented at American Politics Group, Canterbury, UK, 2005.

24. Sifry, *Spoiling for a Fight*.

25. Rensenbrink, "Challenge and Response."

26. Ted Glick, "Jesse Then, Ralph Now?" Associated Press syndicated column, 2003.

27. *New York Times*, January 10, 2004.

28. Greg Gerritt, *Green Party Tempest: Weathering the Storm of 2004* (Providence: Moshassuck River, 2005).

29. Ted Glick, "Green and Growing," Associated Press syndicated column, 2004.

## 8



### LIGHTS, CAMERA, CHAOS? THE EVOLUTION OF CONVENTION "CRISES"

R. Sam Garrett

ON THE SURFACE, THE idea that presidential nominating conventions are prone to crises seems ludicrous. Because of the constant media coverage with which this book is concerned, presidential nominating conventions have become increasingly scripted to avoid any hint of dissent during the parties' media showcases. Given this backdrop, conventions should be the last place we observe any disruption that might be exploited by the media or an opponent—especially a crisis, which suggests fundamental disarray within the convention or lack of unity surrounding the nominee. However, a stroll through convention history reveals that disagreement, disharmony, and even crises are common.

This chapter enhances our understanding of presidential politics, presidential conventions, and the media by exploring how conventions have evolved. The changing nature of convention crises is an important but unexplored element of party politics. A half-century ago, when conventions were charged with real debate and decision making, uncertainty—and the potential for crisis—was common. After serious unrest at conventions in the 1960s, which played out before national television audiences, both major parties deemphasized actual decision making at conventions. Today, conventions largely ratify the choices primary voters have already made. Presidential conventions no longer face serious *political* crises that threaten their ability to function. However, modern attempts to control every facet of conventions are not perfect. *Message* crises, which represent departures from the planned party script, can still occur.

The shift from political crises to message crises at conventions provides a window into the changing nature of American political parties. During the last fifty years, American voters have increasingly strayed from parties, preferring the independent label or rejecting political participation altogether.<sup>1</sup> The