



Presidential Debates

Professor Alan Schroeder

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Drawing on his own experience as an award-winning reporter and TV producer and through illuminating interviews with journalists and producers who have worked on presidential debates, Alan Schroeder sheds new light on every debate from 1960 to the present. From the selection of questioners to the camera angles, from issues of makeup to lighting and stage set, Schroeder shows how decisions are made that influence every aspect of what the audience perceives. *Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV* takes readers on a fascinating backstage tour, approaching the debates within the framework of the fundamental steps to which TV producers adhere: preproduction, production, and postproduction. Calling upon behind-the-scenes stories from seven campaign seasons, Schroeder illustrates how the live component of the debates, far from diminishing dramatic potential, increases our anticipation -- not least because of viewer curiosity to watch one candidate make a grave error and go down in flames.

Presidential Debates illuminates such details as:

- the elaborate attempts to offset height discrepancies between candidates, such as the "belt buckle compromise" between Carter and Ford mandating the height of the candidates' respective podiums;
- the full story behind debate moderator Bernard Shaw's infamous question to Michael Dukakis about his wife being hypothetically raped and murdered; and
- the calculation and faux-spontaneity of Reagan's influential quip, "There you go again," which effectively dismissed Carter's pointed accusations about health care.

With innumerable behind-the-scenes stories about the candidates, their advisers, the on-air correspondents, the producers, and other backstage lore, Schroeder illustrates how, like all forms of television, debates combine artifice with truth. An unusual blend of civics and show biz, the presidential debates are revealed here as both carefully scripted rituals and opportunities for the totally unexpected.

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