

THE PROPHET FROM PLANO:  
AN ANALYSIS OF ROSS PEROT'S 1992 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

by

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Submitted to the Department of  
Communication Studies and the Faculty  
of the Graduate School of the University  
of Kansas in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Date Defended: Dec 14, 1995

## ABSTRACT

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The Prophet from Plano argues that the success and failure of Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign can be explained, in part, by examining his rhetorical strategies. This study argues that Ross Perot appeared as a modern day prophet. Perot possessed nearly all of the characteristics normally associated with prophets. Additionally, Perot's enormous wealth functioned as "proof" to the American people that Perot truly was a prophet. Beyond Perot's adoption of the prophetic persona, Perot appeared on the national political scene at a time of perceived crisis. This too, was consistent with the ancient prophets. The confluence of Perot's prophetic persona and the perceived crisis propelled Perot into national prominence.

This study also analyzes Perot's rhetoric to determine if Perot was employing a contemporary secular jeremiad. Comparing Perot's rhetoric to the characteristics of the jeremiad, some striking similarities are found. Perot exhibited most of the characteristics of the jeremiad and he employed "plain talk" which enhanced his message. However, Perot's attribution of sin prevents categorization of his rhetoric as a contemporary secular jeremiad.

Finally, Perot's ultimate success and failure is traced to his use of the jeremiad and his damaged ethos. Perot's July pullout fatally damaged his prophetic ethos, while his use of the jeremiad prevented Perot from offering specific solutions to the problems he identified. The study concludes that Perot did not, in fact, deliver a contemporary secular jeremiad. Rather, he delivered a variant described as a political jeremiad. In addition to Perot's prophetic persona, Perot's success is attributed to his linkage of the debt/deficit issue with the extinction of the American Dream combined with his unique use of the television medium. Conclusions and thoughts on future areas of research are offered.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and guidance of Dr. Donn Parson in the completion of not only this project but also my graduate education. My appreciation is also extended to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Wil A. Linkugel, Dr. Robert C. Rowland, Dr. Ellen Reid Gold, and Dr. Benjamin Sax.

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## ***CHAPTER ONE: ROSS PEROT***

### ***THE PROPHET FROM PLANO***

From the American public's first encounter with him in 1969 in his unsuccessful attempt to deliver gifts, food and medicine to American POW's in Vietnam to his very public clash with General Motors in the 1980s, Henry Ross Perot has consistently been an enigma. Time magazine described Perot, in the spring of 1992, as sculpting his own "Horatio-Alger-hero-with-a-heart-of gold image" (May 25, p.28) while Peter Applebombe (1992) writing in The New York Times labelled him as the "simple billionaire" (p14L). Perhaps author Todd Mason (1990) described Perot best in his book, Perot: An Unauthorized Biography:

Antigovernment patriot, antiunion populist, antimanagement capitalist, loyal boss who sold out twice to GM, billionaire defender of the underdog, perhaps no contemporary American has been written about more and explained less than Ross Perot. Writers have tried out dozens of labels on him that all fall short of solving the paradox. (p5)

A maverick Texas billionaire with a penchant for drama, Perot gained his fame by marching to the beat of a different drummer. Beginning with Ken Follett's On Wings of Eagles which describes Perot's independent attempts to rescue two of his employees using commandos from revolutionary Iran in 1979, to his stint as head of an educational reform committee in Texas in 1984 where he advocated "no pass, no

play", to his rift with the Reagan administration over the possibility of remaining MIA's in Vietnam, to his strident opposition to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) where the "giant sucking sound" entered our national lexicon, it seems clear that H. Ross Perot has entered the nation's collective unconscious. Most Americans would be familiar with the billionaire Texan from these events alone. However, it was Perot's entry, withdrawal, and ultimate reentry in the 1992 Presidential campaign that have truly made Perot a historic and household name.

Initially, there is considerable external evidence indicating that the Perot campaign was the most successful third party presidential campaign in American political history. In the beginning, Perot profited from a great deal of public cynicism about the workings of the American political machine. Author Garry Wills argued in June of 1992 that the "feeling of drift, the sense that we Americans are no longer in control of ourselves or the world," had manifested "itself in a variety of ways." (p. 42) An April 26th 1992 New York Times/CBS News poll demonstrated the depth of the voter's anger and frustration. The poll found that 59% of the respondents were unhappy with a choice between President Bush or Governor Clinton, but the number of unhappy respondents was reduced to 36% when Ross Perot's name was added to the equation. (Riding discontent..., p. L22)

After his Larry King Live appearance in the spring of 1992 in which Perot openly mused about running for President if his name could be placed on the ballot

in all 50 states, a groundswell of support appeared from a frustrated electorate. Perot made it clear that if "the people" wanted him to run, then he would run. The United States, in the words of Time magazine, was about to experience "the first revolution ever led by a billionaire" (Shapiro, p.27). The groundswell of public support was evident by May of 1992 as indicated by a TIME/CNN poll which found that nearly 32% of likely voters would vote for Perot, more than Bush at 28% or Clinton at 24% (Shapiro, p. 27); a second poll in June found Perot with a 13 point lead over Bush and Clinton (Duffy, p. 32). The existence of these poll numbers appeared despite the fact that many voters did not know much about H. Ross Perot nor what his platform might contain in a run for the presidency. Steven Holmes, writing in The New York Times, in April of 1992 describes Perot's unique approach:

To some who have been drawn into Mr. Perot's orbit and emerged as either backers or bashers, the incident [Perot's commentary on releasing Nelson Mandela] is illustrative of another aspect of his approach to problems: his suggestion [for Mandela's release] was devoid of details on how to achieve the end. (April 27, p. A1)

Thus, from the beginning Perot enjoyed popular support despite, or perhaps because of, the fact he did not define himself by issues (Shapiro, 1992). Perot himself recognized this in an interview, claiming "working folks say . . . we're not interested in your positions, Perot, we're interested in your principles" (Muller, p. 36). In fact,

on many issues, Perot did not even have a position. When asked about an upcoming environmental conference in Rio De Janeiro in an April interview, Perot responded, "I don't know a thing about it" (Shapiro, 1992, p.-27).

Clearly, voter discontent fed the Perot campaign and provided the genesis of his run for the presidency. The depth of the voter anger is illustrated in the final election results as Perot received nearly 20% of the popular vote in 32 states (Strongest Third-Party Finishes, 1992, p. B4). These results occurred despite the fact that Perot did not belong to either of the major political parties nor did he have access to their organizational structures or fund-raising ability. It seems clear that Perot struck a chord with the anger felt by the American people, despite his lack of clear positions on a majority of the primary issues discussed in the campaign.

With voter discontent, the political climate of 1992 was ripe for a change, and Ross Perot had exhibited enormous personal appeal as late as June of 1992. However, discontent does not seem to completely explain the Perot phenomenon. Initially, the level of discontent does not explain the tremendous popularity that Perot experienced during the early part of the campaign. If discontent was the sole factor, then it would seem that any person outside of the "beltway" would have been extremely popular in the 1992 campaign. Perot's attraction to the American electorate was fueled by more than his perceived "outsider" image. Ultimately, the discontent does not explain why Perot failed in his bid for the presidency. If voter discontent in 1992 was the deciding

issue of the election, we might well be living with President Perot. Perot exhibited an attraction that was beyond voter discontent. The purpose of this paper is to examine Perot's attraction. What made Perot so popular? Why did the American electorate trust the maverick billionaire from Texas? What did Perot say or do that appealed to voters?

There were several unique factors about the Perot campaign that seemed tailor made for the attitude expressed by the electorate in 1992. First, Perot's apparent lack of political experience (his perceived "outsider" image) was to his advantage in 1992. In an ordinary election year, Perot's outsider status would have been a handicap but in 1992, where the electorate clearly appeared dissatisfied and cynical with "politics as usual," it became an advantage. Second, that Perot had the money to fund his own "world class campaign" without reliance on PACS (political action committees) or other institutional structures became another advantage in the eyes of the voters. Additionally, Perot's ability to fund his own campaign negated the traditional disadvantages experienced by third-party candidates in fund-raising.

Third, he was the first third- party candidate since John Anderson to participate in the campaign debates prior to the election. This was particularly important for Perot because of the large scale national exposure the debates provided and because it accorded Perot the stature of a "real" presidential candidate. Fourth, the Perot campaign made innovative use of the media during the campaign with

infomercials and use of alternative outlets. This allowed Perot to shun the traditional campaigning methods in favor of televised formats. These factors, coupled with Perot's personal appeal, appeared to favor Perot in the 1992 presidential race. In other words, Perot appeared to have every conceivable advantage in 1992. Additionally, those aspects of third-party candidacy normally considered disadvantages were either negated or were, in fact, advantages for Perot.

Certainly, a multitude of factors must be used to account for the Perot phenomenon of 1992. However, one relatively unexplored area that may explain Perot's attraction is his persona. I will argue that Perot relied on his ethos as a substitute for logos (argument) in the context of the campaign by insisting that the electorate have faith in him. In a campaign that, in the words of The New York Times was "light on details, heavy on drama" (Holmes, p. A1), Perot asked the voters to trust him. This strategy asked the electorate, in effect, to believe Perot *because* he was Perot.

Specifically, Perot assumed the role of a scolding prophet. As a prophet, Perot tapped the sense of drift felt by the American public. If Perot functioned as a prophet, we might ask: What kind of discourse did he have? Did it resemble the discourse of other prophets? Was Perot a modern Samuel, Elijah, Ezekiel, or Mohammed? I believe the Perot phenomenon can be explained, in part, by examining Perot's assumption of the prophetic role and the rhetoric he employed during the

presidential campaign of 1992.

Specifically, I will use Perot's rhetoric as a test case to determine if his rhetoric constituted a contemporary secular jeremiad. If Perot's rhetoric is a jeremiad, to what extent is it a jeremiad? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Does Perot's use of a jeremiad explain his connection with the American people? If Perot's rhetoric is jeremiadic, what is the relationship between prophecy and the jeremiad? Some of these questions may be answered by examining Perot's rhetoric and his prophetic role in the 1992 presidential campaign.

### *JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY*

It appears especially appropriate that we ask these questions about the 1992 campaign for three basic reasons. Initially, because many have argued that the 1992 election was a watershed in American politics, it seems appropriate that we answer some of the lingering questions about the campaign's nature. Aside from the fact that Perot had the strongest finish of any third-party candidate in American history, the campaign has been characterized in a multitude of ways using descriptions ranging from Judith Trent's (1994) "bizarre" ( p. 43) to Gerald Pomper's (1993) observation that the 1992 election "astounded us many times" (p. vii). Therefore, the uniqueness of the campaign justifies an examination of one of the major players. One could argue that the elections of 1994 were, in fact, foreshadowed by the election of 1992.

Secondly, the unique aspects of the campaign deserve a complete analysis.

The presence of any major third party candidate alone justifies an examination of a presidential campaign. In this case, clearly, the presence of Perot altered the strategic environment of the campaign (Denton & Stuckey, 1994). Although not fully understood, most observers admit that Perot's participation in the campaign, the debates, and his innovative use of the media shaped the campaign and ultimately figured in the decision. Additionally, the presence of Perot as a personality, as a unique figure in American public life, as an individual with a distinctive style justifies an examination of his run for the presidency. These reasons are particularly important given that the 1996 campaign is approaching. It is conceivable that we may see Ross Perot once again running a "world class campaign."

Finally, Perot's uncommon use and exploitation of the media, would also justify an examination of the Perot campaign. He was the first presidential candidate to use the so-called "alternative" media. Perot's use of Larry King Live and thirty minute infomercials were unprecedented in any American presidential campaign. These unusual features justify, I believe, a complete examination of the Perot campaign. If we are to understand the unusual dynamics of the 1992 campaign, we should begin by analyzing the critical component, H. Ross Perot.

### ***REVIEW OF LITERATURE***

There appears to be a dearth of serious analysis on the rhetoric of Ross Perot. As yet, there has been little significant research conducted on Perot, his rhetoric, or

his role in the 1992 campaign within the academic community. For the purpose of analysis, I will divide the existing literature into two areas: the popular literature on Perot and scholarly analyses on Perot and the campaign of 1992. As with most presidential campaigns, there was a great deal of media coverage of the candidates in the campaign, including Perot. As a result, the popular literature on Perot is enormous. I will divide the popular literature into three areas: first, daily and weekly news stories on Perot and the campaign, second, biographies and mini-biographies on Perot, and third, analyses and critiques of Perot's campaign and rhetoric.

### ***POPULAR LITERATURE***

The first area examined were the daily and weekly news stories on campaign. There are literally thousands of magazine articles, newspaper columns, and editorials written about virtually every facet and factor of the campaign. While this material is useful in establishing the landscape for examining the Perot campaign, it is insufficient in terms of critical analysis as it is neither scholarly nor exhaustive. Additionally, the majority of the articles are written "in progress." In other words, they are frozen in time without the benefit of the entire campaign as perspective. While this commentary may yield insights into the nature of both the campaign and the election, none of them are scholarly in their perspective nor method.

The second area examined were works on Perot. During the campaign, once Perot emerged as a viable candidate, numerous mini-biographies appeared in news

publications such as Newsweek and Time. Lawrence Wright's article, "The Man From Texarkana," in The New York Times Magazine in June of 1992 is representative of this literature. Wright explores Perot's background noting that the "Perots were a close loving family" (p. 30), and his personality traits. "Perot's Boy Scout manual," Wright notes, "has been thumbed so thoroughly it looks partly eaten" (p. 31). Wright concludes the article arguing that Perot's role as presidential aspirant is the incarnation of Perot as rescuer and that Perot wants a return to the America of his childhood (p. 46). In a similar vein, Howard Fineman's article, "The Man and the Myth," in Newsweek explores Perot's image to determine "how much substance there is in all this sizzle?" (1992, p. 20). He explores Perot's youth, his Horatio Alger image, his time in the navy, his role as patriot and his penchant for risk-taking. Both Wright and Fineman are representative of this literature with their emphasis on personality and anecdotes.

In general, these mini-biographies consist of commentary and analysis of Perot's background and his personality traits (see Greider, 1992; Holmes, 1992; Hayes, 1992; Applebombe, 1992; Also see interviews with Perot: Muller and Woodbury, 1992; "Ross Perot's America," 1992). While these works are useful to establish personality characteristics of the candidate, they are hardly illuminating about the nature of the entire campaign. These works exhibit the same "frozen in time" problem that occurs with campaign reporting. Additionally, these works

emphasize the personality of Perot but not his rhetoric in any detail. For that reason, they are of limited value.

At the time of this writing, no complete biography has been written since the election and only one biography has been published. Todd Mason's Perot: An Unauthorized Biography published in 1990 provides a detailed background of Perot. Mason chronicles Perot's journey from rags to riches, his eccentricities, his personality characteristics, his scrapes with administrations, CEOs, and foreign governments and ultimately his rise to national fame. However, the book, for obvious temporal reasons, has limited value to the present study. A second book, Dorothy P. Levin's (1989) Irreconcilable Differences: Ross Perot versus General Motors chronicles Perot's much celebrated break-up with General Motors during the mid nineteen-eighties. Once again, the book has limited value for this study for both temporal and content reasons.

The third area of popular literature examined were critical analyses of both Perot and the 1992 campaign. Much like the news stories on the campaign, there is no shortage of criticism on Perot, his campaign, and his rhetoric. Some of the literature covered Perot in the early stages of his campaign suggesting why he so was so popular and what his weaknesses might have been as president. For example, Jonathan Alter's article, "How He Might Govern," in a June 1992 Newsweek examined what Perot might have been like as president. Alter examined six categories

(vision, management, candor, focus, tone, and collegiality) to determine whether Perot was suited for the office. Walter Shapiro's article, "President Perot," in Time in May and Tom Morganthau's article, "Issues: Filling in the Blanks," posed many of the same questions. Both articles sought to define Perot on the major issues of the campaign.

During the campaign , there were innumerable essays written on Perot (see Hayes, 1992; Barone, 1992; Arkes, 1992; Scheer, 1992; Simon, 1992), on his deficit plans (see Elving, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Williams and Williams; 1992; Forbes,1992; Mandel, 1992; Dentzer, 1992; Kinsley, 1992), his proposals for electronic town halls (see Colson, 1992; Foell, 1992), his campaign strategies (see Duffy, 1992; Kolbert, 1992; Holmes, 1992; Nagourney, 1992), his penchant for spying on friends and foes alike (see Dewitt, 1992; Rogers and Abramson, 1992), his paranoia (Blumenthal, 1992; Brenner, 1992), his stance on gay rights (Gallagher, 1992; Holmes; 1992), and his early exit and ultimate return to the campaign (see Barrett, 1992; Apple, 1992; Sack, 1992; Kelly; 1992; Toner,1992). This list does not include the hundreds of editorials written at both the local and national level concerning virtually all aspects of Perot and his campaign. Clearly these articles are valuable for establishing the groundwork for a systematic study of Ross Perot's rhetoric. However, none of the surveyed literature deals specifically with Perot's rhetoric nor does it possess the scope and depth of this study.

In terms of post election commentary, several articles and essays have been written to explain the Perot phenomenon. Most of the immediate post-election literature concentrated on the impact of Perot's presence in the race. For example, John Mintz's article, "Even in Defeat, Perot had Significant Impact," argues that Perot's ultimate effect was to send a wake-up call to the country. Many of the articles discuss the lessons that can be drawn from the Perot experience (see Turque, 1992; Carlin, 1992) or assess Perot's impact on politics or the media (see Zoglin, 1992; Aronson, 1992). The majority of the articles assessing Perot's impact on politics and media argue that Perot has changed the mechanisms for campaigning with his use of 1-800 numbers, paid political commercials, and use of free air time. Most of the articles that draw lessons for future campaigns concentrate on Perot's mistakes. For example, Stanley Cloud's article (1992), "The Lesson of Perot," argues that future candidates should learn from Perot's mistakes on running mates, issues, and campaigning. These articles are primarily concerned with what happened and why it happened. But they do not address Perot's rhetoric nor do they attempt a systematic analysis of the Perot campaign.

The popular books written on the campaign devote substantial portions to Perot and his impact on the election. Jack Germond and Jules Whitcover's book (1994), Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992, chronicles the entire course of the campaign. They argue that the election of 1992 can be read as a protest against

"politics as usual." Their treatment of Perot is somewhat critical but they do argue that Perot was a catalyst for energizing the electorate. They focus on Perot as a mouthpiece for the frustrated electorate. Tom Rosensteil's book, Strange Bedfellows: How Television and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992, focuses on the role that media played in the 1992 election. He argues that Perot's use of paid political advertising and the rise of the so-called "alternative media" provided an outlet for voter frustration and anger at the two-party system.

Although useful for this study, Rosensteil's primary focus is the relationship between the media and the candidates. As such, it does not provide a detailed analysis of Perot's rhetoric during the campaign. Again, these books are useful as landscape but they have several limitations which negate their value for this study. First, the books do not focus solely upon Perot nor his rhetoric. Rather, they chronicle the entire 1992 campaign. Consequently, their treatment is superficial at best. Second, even where the authors do focus on Perot, their analysis is neither scholarly nor systematic.

### ***SCHOLARLY ANALYSES***

Several scholarly works including books and articles exist on Perot and the campaign of 1992. Two compilations on the election exist that are relevant. The first, The Election of 1992: Reports and Interpretations (1993) edited by Gerald Pomper contains essays detailing assorted aspects of the campaign. The essays, written by

various authors, provide analyses of the election and, as such, will provide useful background material for the present study, but none involve Perot exclusively or directly. F. Christopher Arterton's essay, "Campaign 92: Strategies and Tactics of the Candidates" along with Gerald Pomper's "The Presidential Election" are the most useful. Arterton's essay is a description of the problems faced by each candidate and the strategies employed to engage those problems. Pomper's essay attempts to analyze the election through an examination of the issues that fueled the campaign. Both of these essays are useful in establishing landscape for this study. Kathleen Frankovic's essay, "Public Opinion in the 1992 Campaign," provides a beneficial analysis of the nature, scope and role of public opinion in the campaign.

The second book, The 1992 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective (1994) edited by Robert Denton, also combines various analyses of the campaign such as discussing the debates, advertising, voter rationality, electronic town hall meetings, and C-SPAN. Again, the essays are enlightening as landscape but they 1) are not specific to the Perot campaign; and 2) neglect the issues in this study.

A third book, The 1992 Presidential Election in the South (1994) edited by Robert Steed, Laurence Moreland and Tod Baker examine the campaign from the southern perspective. This book contains election analyses of the southern states, the nomination process, and electoral politics. This book will be useful in examining the 1992 presidential campaign, but they are deficient in two areas. First, they do not

focus on Perot in the detail envisioned for this study. Second, the scope of the book is restricted to the southern geography of the United States.

Gordon and Benjamin Black's book, The Politics of Discontent: How a New Party Can Make Democracy Work (1994), provides a critique of the 1992 election for the purposes of enacting change. They argue that the election of 1992 should be read as a failure to make those fundamental changes that voters clamored for in their year of discontent. In other words, the election of Bill Clinton did not really change the way Washington works. They propose that real change must occur at the congressional level. Using the results of the election, they propose the development of a new political party to enact real change. They conclude that the "advent of a new party presents a unique opportunity to enact fundamental changes in the electoral and policy process" (p. 26).

Black and Black examine Perot's role in the 1992 campaign and conclude that Perot's failure can be attributed to the influence of polling on the election's outcome and to Perot's failure to use paid media to answer the counterattacks of the Bush and Clinton campaigns. They argue that the free media was a good strategy initially but "it was a poor vehicle both for countering these attacks (Bush and Clinton's) and for building a central focus for the campaign" (p. 121). Additionally, the authors argue that "Perot fell victim to failed polling that did what polling is *never intended* [italics in original] to do - actually shape the way people vote" (p. 126). Their analysis,

although helpful, does not provide a detailed analysis of Perot's rhetoric nor do they account for the link between Perot's success/failure and his rhetoric.

Several articles analyze the 1992 campaign and election. Paul Abramson, John Aldrich, Phil Paolino and David Rhode compare Perot's campaign to other independent candidacies in their article, "Third-Party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot." They argue that the current electoral system maintains the "duopoly" of the two-party system. The authors conclude that the American system confirms "Duverger's Law" which states that "the simple majority single-ballot system favours [sic] the two-party system" (1995, p. 352).

Duverger's law applies to the American system for two reasons. First, the current system produces a "mechanical" effect which allows a candidate to win a large number of popular votes but only a few electoral votes. Additionally, the system produces a "psychological" effect which convinces voters not to vote for a candidate that cannot win the election (p. 353). Abramson et al. conclude that Perot probably would not have won the election but, in "psychological" terms, he was "hurt somewhat by the wasted vote argument" (1995, p. 359). However, the "mechanical" effects were far stronger than the "psychological" effects in 1992. They conclude that the "Wallace, Anderson, and Perot candidacies illustrate that both the mechanical effects of the electoral system, as well as the psychological effects of the system on

individual voters, create serious problems for candidates who challenge two-party dominance" (1995, p. 367). This perspective is supported by Gordon and Benjamin Black's analysis in their article, "Perot Wins! The Election that Could Have Been," (1995) which argues that Perot could have won the election if pre-election polls had no predicted his defeat.

Steven Brams and Samuel Merrill's article, "Would Ross Perot Have Won the 1992 Presidential Election Under Approval Voting," argues that under an "approval voting" system where the electorate "can vote for as many candidates as they like or consider acceptable" (1994, p. 39), Ross Perot would still have lost the election but would "have given a very different cast to the 1992 presidential election" (1994, p. 43).

R. Micheal Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler's article (1995), "Economic, Issues and the Perot Candidacy: Voter Choice in the 1992 Presidential Election," is perhaps the most interesting analysis of the campaign written to date. Using a statistical analysis of 1992 National Election Studies data, they argue that the common interpretations of the 1992 election are false. First, they argue that the angry voter hypothesis is not sufficient to explain the election. They contend that the frustrated electorate should be distinguished "from issue voters who prefer policy alternatives" (p. 717). In other words, the angry voters are more accurately characterized as "anti-status quo voters, or anti-incumbent voters" (p. 717). The authors argue that:

while Perot may have been especially appealing to angry voters, it remains for someone to demonstrate what these voters were angry about. For we show that voters interested in antigovernment reform (term limits) were no more supportive of Perot than other voters, and that voters who were upset about the economy were no more likely to support Perot than other voters, since such voters went overwhelmingly in Clinton's direction. (p.717-718)

Second, voters were angry not at government but at the economy. In fact, the authors conclude, "the economy was the dominant factor in the 1992 election" (p. 738). Additionally, the authors argue that Clinton was the beneficiary of the electorate's concern about the economy. In other words, Clinton, rather than Perot, "won the battle of the economically dissatisfied" (p. 738). The authors conclude that Perot's candidacy can be summarized with three observations. First, the deficit issue worked for Perot. Second, he took more votes from Bush than from Clinton. Third, those voters he did take from Bush were men rather than women (p. 739). Beyond those conclusions, the authors claim that Perot's appeal had "little systematic component" (p. 739). Seymour Lipset's article (1993), "The Significance of the 1992 election," also argues that the primary factor in the election was the prevailing economic situation which resulted in a Clinton victory.

These analyses are useful for interpreting the results of the 1992 election and they provide a backdrop against which to check the conclusions of this study.

However, none of these analyses are rhetorical in nature nor do they specifically isolate Perot's rhetorical topoi. In addition, these studies are primarily concerned with the election and essentially ignore the campaign.

A number of studies have been conducted on the role of the media in the 1992 campaign. Diamond, McKay, and Silverman (1993) analyze the alternative media outlets concluding that they have not supplanted the traditional structures but have arisen alongside them. Graber (1993), analyzing the election of 1992, argues that the media's current methods of presenting political information reinforces the public's lack of knowledge concerning political issues. Kendall (1993) argues that the rhetoric of presidential candidates mediated by the electronic press devalues the oratory and provides none of the classical functions normally associated with oratory.

In addition, Trent (1993) argues that voters and the media differ on the importance of desired attributes of presidential candidates. Studying the 1988 and 1992 campaign, Trent found there were significant differences between voters and the media on the characteristics of an ideal candidate but those differences concerned the importance of certain attributes over other attributes rather than whether those characteristics were desirable or undesirable. Powell and Wanzerried (1993) argue that voter perceptions of candidates do not differ significantly with the viewing of presidential debates. They found that respondents reinforced rather than changed their perceptions of the candidates after viewing the debates.

Willnat (1993) argues that the media can prime the electorate to facilitate negative recall about the candidates. Specifically, the study concludes that negative news stories on President Bush affected the electorate's perception of his handling of the recession. Temple (1993) analyzes media coverage of political advertising in 1992. Using content analysis, she describes media preferences in political advertising, lead stories, image, advertising features, and strategy and execution. Kerbel (1994), using content analysis, examines how television covers elections and what impact the medium ultimately brings to the event. Once again, these studies isolate specific aspects of the 1992 campaign, but they do not focus solely on Perot nor do they analyze his rhetoric in any systematic way.

In terms of critical analyses of Ross Perot's rhetoric, only a handful of projects can be identified. A dissertation search yielded only two entries. One entry dealt with Perot's term on the Texas educational reform committee in 1984 (Jackson, 1987), while a second analyzed third party voting patterns in South Dakota (Bennett, 1994). Using a case study and aggregate data, Bennet concluded that, based on data from South Dakota, there was no significant difference between those voting for Perot and those voting for Clinton or Bush in terms of alienation. Neither study dealt specifically with Perot's campaign and, in Bennet's case, is limited geographically.

Several papers have been written on Perot including a panel at the Speech Communication Association annual convention in 1993 entitled "A World Class

Campaign: Not!!: The 1992 Perot Phenomenon". The papers on that panel provide a direct analysis of Perot's campaign. Patricia Ganer's essay analyzes the campaign from the perspective of actions versus rhetoric. She concludes that Perot's actions were in direct contrast to his rhetoric. Jeanine Congalton's essay "An Assessment of Perot's Argumentation in the Debates and Infomercials" analyzes Perot's arguments in the various media formats. Christi Etienne's analysis centers on Perot's use of fantasy themes. A fourth paper titled, "Perot's Campaign: The Jeremiad in Action," written by the author (co-authored with Mark Morman), details the jeremiadic aspects of the campaign although not in the detail envisioned for this study. Clearly, none of the above analyses quite takes the same perspective as this study. Additionally, as they are "convention" essays, they lack the scope and depth of the present study.

### ***DESIGN OF THE STUDY***

Because Perot's involvement in public life preceded the campaign and subsequently he has become more involved in public life and public policy, it would seem appropriate to limit the scope of this study to the campaign of 1992. Additionally, because of the unique nature of Perot's campaign, we can easily identify both a starting point (his appearance on Larry King Live in March) and an ending point (the November 4th election) of his campaign occurring within an eight month span. Even Perot's withdrawal and re-entry had definite starting and stopping points. Within that time frame, there are several rhetorical artifacts that will serve as an

analytical basis for this study. Some of them are obvious choices while others are included to provide a representative sample of Perot's rhetoric.

Initially, it would seem vital that Perot's rhetoric from the three presidential debates be analyzed. Aside from the fact that Perot was the first major third-party contender since John Anderson to be allowed in the debates, the debates are also a vital platform for reaching a substantial portion of the electorate and, as such, they should provide a basis for examining the nature and scope of Perot's rhetoric. Using texts from The New York Times, I will analyze the major rhetorical themes that surfaced in the debates. Secondly, Perot's basic stump speech as reported by The New York Times will be analyzed in detail. This speech should provide the basic themes inherent to the Perot campaign. Perot's campaign provides a unique third artifact in need of examination, the infomercial or paid political commercial. These infomercials as reported in The New York Times and as transcribed by the author should provide a representative example of Perot's rhetorical themes. As noted above, Perot was really the first to make extensive use of alternative media forms because he shunned the traditional campaign format. Consequently, these infomercials represent powerful examples of Perot's rhetoric.

In addition, three specific speeches of Perot bear inspection. First, Perot's resignation speech delivered on the eve of the Democratic Convention which provided Perot's rationale for leaving the campaign. The themes articulated in the

speech should be analyzed. Second, Perot's speech upon re-entering the campaign in October should be analyzed. It is this speech which provides the basic justification for Perot's run at the presidency and, as such, it should be examined to identify the rhetorical themes present. Finally, Perot's concession speech on election eve should be examined for it provides the end point of the Perot campaign. Clearly, all of these speeches bear inspection as they were rhetorical events at crucial points in the campaign. A fourth speech, the NAACP speech delivered in Nashville, also will be included because of some controversial remarks in the speech. In addition to the wide ranging nature of these selected artifacts, they also represent a lengthy time span in the campaign. This approach will allow a determination of 1) Perot's rhetoric in the context of the entire campaign; 2) whether there were variations or contradictory elements to Perot's rhetoric over the course of the entire campaign; and 3) whether there was any evolution in Perot's campaign rhetoric from beginning to end.

### ***METHODOLOGY***

In this study, I will argue that Ross Perot's successes and failures are tied to his use of a prophetic persona and to his rhetorical themes adopted during the campaign. My argument is that the combination of these two factors can partially explain Perot's enormous popularity and ultimate failure in the 1992 presidential election. In order to illustrate my argument in the following chapters, I will lay out the characteristics of a prophet, discuss the characteristics of a contemporary secular

jeremiad, and offer analysis on why Perot's adoption of the prophetic persona and use of the jeremiad explains both his success and failure. Finally, I will offer conclusions and implications for future research.

Chapter two will focus on the nature of prophets and prophecy. Particular attention will be paid to the definition of prophets, characteristics of prophets and the social conditions under which prophecy arise. Specifically, I will argue that Perot's use of prophetic ethos as argument was the basic strategy of the campaign but was ultimately doomed to failure because ethos requires, as Aristotle noted, logos and pathos.

Chapter three will focus on the Perot's rhetorical themes and the rhetorical situation that existed at the time of Perot's entry into the 1992 presidential campaign. I will argue that Perot's rhetoric possessed most of the characteristics associated with a contemporary secular jeremiad. However, Perot's strategic placement of sin precludes labelling his rhetoric as a contemporary secular jeremiad. I will argue that Perot used a quasi-jeremiad to tap into the public cynicism over "politics as usual." Specifically, this chapter will argue that the "cynical" mood of the electorate was the critical factor in the election as the presence of the disenchanting electorate fueled the Perot campaign.

Chapter four will offer a critical analysis of the campaign. I will argue that Perot's adoption of the prophetic role, combined with his rhetorical themes can

partially explain Perot's enormous popularity and ultimate failure in 1992.

Chapter five attempts to move beyond the scope of the present study and offers observations regarding future research on presidential campaigns.

## ***CHAPTER TWO: A MODERN PROPHET?***

"I'm the prophet of the Utterly Absurd, of the Patently Impossible and Vain."

- Rudyard Kipling, The Song of the Banjo

If Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign accurately can be labelled a "contemporary secular jeremiad", it is also possible to speculate that the man preaching the message was a prophet: a modern Jeremiah. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the question: Is Ross Perot a modern prophet? In order to answer the question, three areas require explication. First, a definition of the term "prophet" is required. Second, the characteristics of prophets should be examined to see which, if any, Ross Perot exhibited. Third, the historical and cultural conditions under which prophets generally appear should be delineated to determine whether similar conditions existed in our culture at the time of 1992 presidential election. If Perot exhibits many of the characteristics of recognized prophets, then we may explain the power of Perot's rhetoric during the 1992 presidential campaign.

### ***WHAT IS A PROPHET?***

In popular modern usage, the word "prophet" has come to mean a psychic or a predictor of the future, losing its original meaning. The term "prophet" is correctly interpreted as communicator. Johannes Lindblom, in his book Prophecy in Ancient

Israel (1962), explains the true nature of prophecy:

It is often said that the prophet is a person who has the gift of foretelling the future. The word "prophet" itself seems to support this definition. Yet, as has been shown *pro* (italics in original) in the Greek term prophetes does not mean "before" but "forth". Thus the Greek term indicates that a prophet is a preacher, a *forthteller* rather than a *foreteller*. In reality men and women who belong to the prophetic type have been, in the first place, persons who have had something to proclaim, something to announce publicly (their message has of course frequently also been about future events). (p.1)

This definition suggests that prophecy includes both the idea of communication and prediction, or foretelling. However, despite the modern meaning, a "prophet" is properly understood first, and foremost, as a communicator: someone who communicates a message. But a communicator to whom? Or what?

The great prophets knew for whom they were preaching. They knew they were communicating from their "God." They understood their function as intermediary between "God" and the people. Emil G. Kraeling (1969) argues in The Prophets that the Hebrew prophet "regarded himself as being either the spokesman of his god, or, if prompted to go somewhere to deliver an oracle, as a messenger of his god" (pp. 12-13). He concludes that "a prophet in the Hebrew sense," was a man who "knew himself to be speaking with divine authority" (p.12). Sheldon Blank, Nelson

Glueck Professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College, concludes that an appropriate definition of the word "prophet" encompasses both prediction and communication. However, communication is what defines a prophet. He explains in Understanding the Prophets that it cannot be denied that "the Hebrew prophets predicted. They did indeed....Only, it was not because they predicted that they were called prophets; it was because they spoke for God" (1969, p.41). Thus from the original Hebrew sense of the term, a proper definition of prophet would concern the function of the prophet: to relay messages from God. We may use many words to describe this function (shaman, intermediary, interpreter, messenger), and prophecies may cross many cultures, and we may include the concept of prediction within the definition. However, the essential point remains that a prophet is someone who functions as a communicator from "God" to the people.

### ***THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROPHET***

Definitions of the word "prophet" provide a starting point from which a more intensive examination can be launched. Examining the prophet's characteristics may provide a suitable framework to fully answer the question, what is a prophet? Lindblom, in his book Prophecy in Ancient Israel identifies what he considers to be the three defining characteristics. Lindblom argues that a prophet was a person who was conscious of having received a special call from his god, who had revelatory experiences, and who proclaimed to the people the message received through

revelation. (p.7)

Frank Seilhamer, Professor of Old Testament at the Hamma School of Theology, delineates the four characteristics of prophets and prophetic messages in his book Prophets and Prophecy (1977). He argues that the common characteristics of the biblical prophets were 1) the "absolute assurance that God had called them personally into his service" (p. 2); 2) the prophetic utterances were "understood by them (the prophets) to be God's words, not the prophet's own concoctions" (p. 3); 3) that prophetic messages and the prophets themselves were "both radically conservative ethically, socially, and theologically" (p.3); and 4) the prophets were "generally laypersons" (p. 5)

Blank (1969) offers a similar analysis. He contends that a prophet is defined by four characteristics. First, the "prophet becomes aware of his mission. He knows that he is being *sent*" by God. Second, "before he can go he must overcome a natural sense of inadequacy" for the task. Third, "he is sent to speak for God, to say what God wants said." Fourth, "he is fully aware of the magnitude of his task, conscious that communication is a difficult business" (pp. 35-36).

Clearly, there is no agreement on the characteristics of prophecy. However, there are some commonalities that cross the various perspectives. For the purposes of this study, I will argue that a prophet possesses three characteristics. First, a prophet is someone who speaks to the people from God. Second, a prophet *believes* that he has

been sent by God to speak to the people. Third, a prophet is someone who advocates a message grounded in a tradition. These appear to be the primary defining characteristics. A full examination of each of one of these characteristics is required to fully illuminate the nature of prophecy and prophets.

The first, and primary, characteristic of prophets is their communication function. Prophets speak to an audience from God. The definition of prophets noted earlier concerns this communication function. Helmer Ringgren, Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at the University of Uppsala, argues that "Old Testament prophets proclaim[ed] messages from Yahweh speaking in his name and using the messenger formula *ko'amar YHWH*, 'Thus says Yahweh'" (Israel's Prophetic Tradition, p. 1). In other words, prophets speak God's word to the people.

A second characteristic of prophecy is that the prophet believes he/she has been called by God. A messenger from God must have some contact with the deity. This connection is necessary for both the prophet and the prophet's audience. Seilhamer explains that "each person understood his selection somehow to have been a divine one" (p2). Blank (1969) argues that prophets "based their authority solidly on their conviction that God had called them for His purpose" (p. 63). In fact, the original Hebrew term *nabi* most likely meant "one who has been called - one whom God has summoned" (Blank, 1969, p.40).

While this conviction explains the prophet's certainty concerning the mission,

it cannot explain the reaction of followers or the general audience with respect to the prophet. Thomas Overholt, in his book Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity, argues that the prophet's belief is, in fact, not nearly as important as the audience's belief. He contends that "prophets cannot be effective and cannot function as intermediaries unless the people acknowledge their claim to authority, and the social reality of prophecy depends upon this act. Members of an audience are free to choose whom they follow" (1989, p.70). J.R. Porter (1982) writes in "The Origins of Prophecy in Ancient Israel", that "as in other cultures, it was not specific types of behaviour [sic] that were decisive but the recognition by the group that an individual had been chosen by the deity as his intermediary" (Israel's Prophetic Tradition, p.22).

In fact, Overholt concludes that from "the point of view of audience reaction, then, the general criterion for the attribution of authority to prophets might be expressed as perceived effectiveness" (1989, p.71). Part of this perceived effectiveness comes from the prophet's ability to articulate the problems that are facing a specific historical situation. In other words, from the audience's perspective, a prophet must be a gifted orator. Seilhamer (1977) explains that historically the "great prophets have shown themselves to be perceptive evaluators of existence as it really" was. Prophets "saw and reported life and people 'in the raw,' as it were, putting their fingers on issues that are both universal and apparently everlasting in

their scope and duration. When it came to describing the problems of individuals and society, they fixed their focus on those dimensions of living that still touch all of our lives" (p.78).

Beyond the prophet's ability to describe universal issues that affect all of the people, a prophet's ability to articulate those problems facing the people fulfills an explanatory function. Overholt asserts that "at the level of what is said, one mark of prophetic authority is the ability to clarify and articulate what audience members themselves have begun to feel about the particular situation...prophetic utterances, are experienced as having an explanatory power" (1989, p.71). Blank (1969) states that a prophet's true test is the ability to "say" the right thing at the right time. "It is the timing that distinguishes the true from the 'false' prophet. A 'false prophet speaks a good word in a wrong context" (p.89). Overholt concludes that combining a continuity of tradition with a prophet's ability to articulate current problems creates prophetic authority for the audience:

The people choose their prophets; that is, they attribute authority to them, because they perceive in the proclamation continuity with the cultural traditions sufficient to make what they say intelligible and at the same time innovations sufficient to offer the possibility of a new interpretation that will bring order out of chaos. Thus, another closely related mark of prophetic authority is the effectiveness, real or imagined, that seems to characterize

the intermediary's activities. This effectiveness is perhaps most often experienced in the form of rhetorical skill (to his followers the prophet's message makes sense out of the current crisis situation) but marvelous acts, including instances of fulfilled prophecy, may also play a role. (1989, p.71)

Therefore, a central characteristic is the private belief that a prophet's call is divine in origin, while the audience must base their belief upon the public proclamations of what the prophet says.

A third characteristic of prophecy is that it is grounded within a particular historical tradition. A prophet's message is addressed to a particular group of people living in a specific situation at a particular time, and, as Overholt concludes, "the message's credibility is judged in terms of how adequate it appears to be for coping for specific problems presented by that situation" (p. 33).

One criterion by which this adequacy is likely to be evaluated is continuity with the broad cultural tradition of the people" (p.33). Consequently, a prophet must speak from within a particular tradition if the people are to listen to his message. Overholt argues that a prophet's "message must have recognizable roots in the traditional but now threatened cultural synthesis for it to be understood and acceptable" (p. 114). Seilhamer (1977) concurs with this analysis. "Prophets," he argues, "were not persons who broke with their religious traditions." Rather, the prophets "were staunch advocates of the religious heritage from which they sprang"

(p.3). He concludes that the "prophets were not innovators; they were rooted and grounded in the past. They were not the originators of the faith of Israel, they were the heirs and interpreters of a tradition that went back to Moses" (Seilhamer, 1977, p.27).

Robin Lane Fox, a Fellow at New College, Oxford, in his book The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible agrees with this analysis. Specifically, he notes that current interpretations of prophets as radicals are erroneous:

Nowadays, prophets confront us as voices against the current who are speaking against their own generation...It is easy to imagine...them as outsiders...they become, then, social or political radicals to their modern admirers. These ways of imagining the prophets are misleading.

(1991, p. 314)

Another term that describes this function is restoration. Prophets usually perceived a straying, a deviation, from the covenant by the people. As a result, they sought a return to the tradition they saw as threatened by the breaking of that covenant. For the prophets, restoration was the path to salvation. This is not to say that all prophets possessed this characteristic. Clearly, there are exceptions to the rule. For example, one could argue that Jesus Christ was a prophet. Certainly, Christ came out of a particular historical tradition, but, to Christians, he eventually transcended that tradition and therefore was not a restoration of what was but a beginning of something new. However, the reason that he transcended that tradition was not

because he was a prophet, it was because, to them, he was a savior. In fact, Jesus fulfilled both functions. He fulfilled the tradition of the Old Prophets as they had foreseen the coming of a savior but then transcended that tradition into a new one. Largely this is a matter of perspective. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet not a savior; Christians believe he was a savior not a prophet. Ultimately, his presence does not deny that most prophets were, in fact, grounded within their tradition.

### ***RECOGNIZING TRUE PROPHETS: ACTS OF POWER***

Beyond the prophet's words, the only other source of legitimation, with respect to the audience, is the presence of what Overholt calls "supernatural confirmation." In other words, beyond what the prophet says, the audience may attribute some prophetic authority based upon acts of power confirming that the prophet really is speaking for God. Winward (1968) explains the distinction:

Like the spoken word, so also the enacted word of the prophet had effective power....Some of the prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, had recourse to symbolic actions. These were not simply visual aids, attempts to reinforce a message addressed to the ears by presenting it also to the eyes. For "such an action served not only to represent and make evident a particular fact, but also to make that fact a reality". (p.24)

Overholt explains that acts of power "whether witnessed or heard of, had a particular effect upon the relationship that existed between those religious functionaries and

their societies" (1989, p.110 ). In short, acts of power confirm for the audience the prophet's authority. Blank argues that such miracle working provided evidence of a divine presence. He states that for "the writers of the Bible the performance of miracles passed as evidence that a man was a prophet." (1969, p.17) John Sawyer, in his book Prophecy and the Prophets of the Old Testament (1987), concludes that miracles (or acts of power) "constitute one of the main ways by which society recognizes the prophet and acknowledges his power, in particular the truth and divine authority of his word" (p.14). While these general characteristics of prophets are useful in establishing the nature of prophets, an examination of the social conditions that give rise to the appearance of prophets may also shed light on the question of prophets and prophecy.

### ***SOCIAL CONDITIONS THAT GIVE RISE TO PROPHETS***

A fundamental social condition for the appearance of prophets appears to be a crisis of some kind. Emil Kraeling notes that "as those birds called the petrels, of which the albatross is the greatest, were said to appear to mariners in the storms at sea, so prophets emerged at the time when the tempests of war were approaching" (1969, p.19). Overholt explains that prophecy "at least as far as named, independently operating prophets are concerned, appears only in times of special crisis, either domestic (e.g., the transition to the monarchy) or international" (1989, p.112). He concludes that crisis situations necessitates the appearance of a prophet

because "at such times humans feel most vulnerable, least in control, and more in need of explanations that will make sense of a seemingly chaotic world" (1989, p.113). While a crisis situation, or at least the perception of a crisis, appears to be a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition for the appearance of prophets in a given historical-cultural situation. In other words, a crisis does not necessarily mean that a prophet will appear.

One may ask that, if we know the general characteristics of prophets and the prophetic situation, particularly in the Hebrew sense, would we be able to recognize a prophet if he were to appear today. J.R. Porter (1982) notes that one way any given society recognizes a prophet is by comparison. He states that "one way in which the society achieves this objective [recognizing true prophets] is by comparing the behaviour [sic] of people in the past whom it recognises [sic] as divinely possessed with what is observed among people in the present" (Israel's Prophetic Tradition, p.24).

However, this dynamic of the relationship is not restricted to the audience. Porter notes that the relationship is, in fact, a two-way relationship. He argues that "In turn, possessed individuals learn from the society the kind of behaviour [sic] that is expected of them and consciously or subconsciously conform to it" (p24). In other words, prophets learn from the society what behavior is expected of them *as prophets* just as society learns from individual prophets what criteria should be established to

recognize the appearance of true prophets. In rhetorical terms, this means that prophets understand that what they *say* must conform to what society looks for, rhetorically, in a prophet. As noted earlier, the prophet must speak, or claim to speak the word of God and he/she typically advocates a traditional message.

The criteria for differentiating the true from the false prophet are still difficult to discern. Thomas Overholt suggests that the criteria for such establishment are extremely ambiguous. "In fact, all such criteria are inherently ambiguous. The examples cited earlier...display what everyone already knows: we have no one definitive interpretation of the tradition against which all claims can be easily and objectively measured" (1989, p.182). As a result, there is no set criteria to distinguish the true prophet from the false prophet. In any given historical-cultural situation, the audience members must be the ones to decide if, in fact, a particular individual is a true prophet.

At first, this definition of prophecy may appear tautological. In fact, not all people who possess these characteristics are labelled prophets by an audience nor are all true prophets appropriately recognized by an audience as prophets. As Overholt notes, "to say that in a given social context prophecy came to an end is not to deny the theoretical possibility of valid prophetic activity but rather to note the failure of the members of that society, at least for the moment, to credit (authorize) specific instances of prophetic behavior" (1989, p.159).

However, this definition does allow for attribution of prophetic authority by an audience based on a number of different factors or criteria. In other words, not everyone who advocates a traditional message is considered a prophet but someone who advocated a message rooted in tradition, claimed to speak the word of God, and produced miracles (acts of power) as evidence of their divinity would be accorded the status of prophet by the auditors of that message. If the audience perceives a sufficient number of criteria to have been met, they will then attribute prophetic authority to that person. As Overholt concludes, the decision ultimately rests in the hands of the audience members:

Feedback from the audience to the prophet turns out to be the key.

Although a speaker may claim to have received a revelation from the god and to be a prophet by virtue of proclaiming it, the failure of the audience to acknowledge, in effect to authorize, this activity means that the God-prophet-audience-prophet chain is truncated, thus losing its final stage.....

(1989, p.159)

In summary, a prophet will generally appear at a time of crisis in a given culture. The prophet will espouse a message rooted in the tradition of his people. The prophet will believe that he has been sent by God as a communicator to the people. The people will attribute authority to the prophet based on what he says in relation to the perceived historical-cultural situation. Additionally, the prophet may invoke

miracles, or acts of power, that provide evidence of his divine origin.

### ***ROSS PEROT: A MODERN PROPHET?***

Having established the definition of a prophet, the characteristics of prophets, and the social conditions under which prophecy arise, I will now examine Ross Perot's rhetoric to answer the question: Is Ross Perot a modern prophet and, if so, what social conditions made his prophecy possible? First, I will consider the definition of a prophet. As explained earlier, a prophet is properly defined as a communicator, an intermediary, sent by God to an audience.

Models of the prophetic process are typically diagrammed in one-way fashion. God chooses a prophet (intermediary) to communicate his message to the audience. The prophet, believing he has been chosen by God, consciously communicates God's message to the audience. The audience receives the message and, as noted earlier, is free to accept or disregard the message. Whatever the final outcome, the initial process remains the same: God to prophet to audience.

Clearly, Ross Perot communicated to an audience during the 1992 campaign. However, because Perot's prophecy was secular in nature, the question of God becomes important. With a secular prophet, "God" as an entity does not really exist. Covenant theology states that "God" is in the form of the sacred documents that have been handed down from the elders. Those documents, or what the people understand those documents to be, become the guiding principles for the people. Thus, in a

secular prophecy, the prophets are self-appointed. They are not literally sent, in the Biblical sense. Rather, they come, in the secular sense. In Perot's case, he came to deliver his message of sin and repentance using the sacred documents of the American experience: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Perot never consciously noted that he was a prophet. He merely delivered his message. If Perot is the prophet (intermediary), then to whom is he speaking?

Clearly, Perot's message is targeted at the American electorate. Even before Perot had unofficially declared his candidacy, his rhetoric reflected the collective "we". In a speech to the National Press Club in March of 1992, Perot stated that "we own this country. Government should come from us" (Perot p. 9J). During the campaign, Perot's standard stump speech repeatedly addressed the audience with questions such as "Can you live with the fact..." and "Can we agree that we have work to do" or "...ask yourself, aren't you as tough as your parents were?" (Perot, 1992, p. 18A) At the end of the campaign, Perot's concession speech clearly reflected the concept suggesting that "We need to all work together....Because if we do, you benefit, the country benefits, your children benefit and everybody wins" (Perot, 1992, p. B5).

The central tenet of Perot's message is political reform. Perot seeks not only to cure the present ills but also to change the way the system operates. Such an interpretation would fit with past prophets who openly challenged the establishment

but sought restoration. Nelson Blank observed that the biblical prophets "were 'disturbers of the peace'; they did not soothe but irritate" (1969, p.48).

However, we should note that such criticism does not mean that prophets were radicals. As explained earlier, prophets championed a traditional message that had its roots in the heritage of the culture. Ross Perot's criticism of the government challenged both the left and the right but it too was rooted in a cultural tradition. In an interview in Time magazine in May of 1992, Perot openly challenged the system but the call was in terms of restoration, rather than revolution. When asked about his principles, he stated:

The people feel very strongly that they have no voice in their government.

We have a political system that is driven by getting money....Now make the

Congress - make the White House - sensitive to the owners of the country

again. That's very important to me. These are principles of mine.

(Muller and Woodbury, 36)

In his resignation speech, Perot explicitly stated that his goal was (and is) reform rather than revolution. He said that "throughout this effort we have said repeatedly that our objective is to improve our country, not disrupt the political process" (Perot, 1992, A16).

Perot's mistrust of the government and the political system is well-known. In an interview with The New York Times, Perot emphasized his disdain for the election

process, stating, "I consider the whole process as one that attracts the wrong kind of person...These are people who are ego driven and power driven" (Perot, 1992, p.A16).

In an interview on the Today show in June, Perot again sounded the call against the process, stating, "I hate this whole process because everybody wants to just jump at things, rather than really figure them out" (Perot, 1992, p. 4A).

In addition to the election process, Perot was especially disgusted with politics, particularly Washington politics. Perot summarized the position in his October re-entry speech: "The American people are really concerned about a Government where people go to Washington to cash in and not to serve" (Perot, 1992, p.A20). However, he was careful to distinguish that government, not people, is the problem (I will discuss this further in chapter three). In the first of his four thirty minute television commercials, or infomercials, Perot stated a familiar theme:

The American people are good...And yet over time we have created a country that's a mess. We have a situation in which our President blames Congress, Congress blames the President, the Democrats and the Republicans blame each other. Nobody steps up to the plate and accepts responsibility for anything. (Perot, 1992, pA16)

In his May Time interview, Perot was careful to indict the system, not the people:

We have a political system that's driven by getting money. Running up and down the hall of Congress all day, every day, are the organized

special interests who have the money that makes it possible to buy television time to campaign to get re-elected next year. There are no villains here. It's just something that evolved. (Muller and Woodbury, p. 36)

Perot, while speaking against the current political system, still sought a return, a restoration, to a previous time. A time at the beginning of the country, a time when the system worked. As noted earlier, this is a characteristic of prophets: advocating a message rooted in the cultural tradition of the people. Perot's standard stump speech provides an excellent example:

You literally have changed the political process. You have told the people in Washington, "Listen to us for a change." You have reminded the people in Washington that you own this country. Once again, we've gone back 200 years to a point where the people in Washington are your servants.

(Perot, 1992, p.18A)

Clearly, he sought a return to the time of the Founding Fathers when Government supposedly served the people. Speaking to his volunteers in his July resignation speech, Perot explicitly stated that "...you are America. And I am certain that the founding fathers would be very proud of you" (Perot, 1992, p. A16).

Perot' speech to the National Press Club in March of 1992 exemplified the point:

I feel as owners of this country, if we're going anywhere, you've got to

send them a message: You work for us, we don't work for you. Under the Constitution, you are our servants. Grow up! Work as a team! Serve the people, solve the problem, and move on to the next one. (Perot, 1992, p. 9J)

Perot's October 1992 re-entry speech provided another example:

The American people are concerned about a Government in gridlock. Our people are good. The American people are good. But they have a Government that is a mess. The American people are concerned about this Government they pay for that doesn't produce results. (Perot, 1992, p. A20)

The net effect of Perot's rhetoric was to expound a message of sin. For Perot, the covenant had been violated. His request was repentance. I will argue in chapter three that Perot's shifting of the blame from the people to the government was done for strategic reasons.

### ***SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE***

Another strategic ploy on Perot's part was the grassroots campaign that supposedly propelled Perot into prominence. Certainly, Perot's "call" from the volunteers functioned as evidence of his claim that he served the people. Perot cast himself as a servant of the people in order to communicate to the people. He wanted to increase his appeal by appearing as though he was a product of a grassroots movement. On more than one occasion, Perot directly states that he is a *servant of the people*. Initially, Perot publicly proclaimed that he would not run for President unless

he had a mandate from the people. In an interview with Time magazine in May of 1992 Perot stated that "If the people want me to run as their servant, then I will do everything I can" (Woodbury and Muller, p. 38). Perot's standard stump speech consistently made references to serving the people claiming that the "only thing that matters to me is what the American people want" (Perot, 1992, p. 18A). Upon reentering the race in October of 1992, Perot explicitly commented that he serves the people, stating, "I don't belong to anybody but you. You the people own me. If you elect me I go as your servant" (Perot, p.A20). Later in the same speech he stated that "I would like to thank you the American people. By choosing me as your candidate, you have given me the highest honor I could ever receive" (Perot, 1992, p. A20).

Another characteristic of his rhetoric that supports this interpretation is Perot's apparent reluctance to seek the presidency. A consistent theme of Perot's rhetoric is that he had been asked (called) to do the task. In an interview on the Today program in October of 1992 Perot explicitly made the point:

I'm here as a cleanup man. I'm just a guy showing up after the party with a shovel and a broom to try to clean it up. I didn't create the mess. And I'm willing to go through everything you have to go through in the campaign process and all the distortions and things we've talked about this morning, because five and a half million people asked me to do it.

(Perot, 1992, p. A14)

Time and time again, Perot laments the need for joining the race. He categorically states that he really did not want to run for president, but circumstances and, the call of the people, dictated that he do so. In his May interview with Time, he made the point clear:

I don't have to do this. No, I could wait till August. You know, what's the hurry? If all 50 states are done, I don't even need to make an announcement. I've already said I'll do it. Let's assume that the American people want to keep things the way they are. I hope it's apparent to you, [that] I will be tickled to death to stay down here, look after my business, enjoy my family. (Muller and Woodbury, p. 43)

Perot made it appear as though he did not want the job. Playing the role of the sought, rather than the seeker, allowed Perot the luxury of claiming he did not want or need the job of president. He was only running because the people wanted him to run. This characteristic made Perot more acceptable because he appeared to have no personal interest in the presidency. He merely wanted to help his fellow man.

### ***WAS PEROT A PROPHET?***

Was the communication divine in origin? Obviously, since Perot operated in the realm of the secular, the issue of divinity is not really a search for God. Rather, the question becomes: If Perot was sent, if he *functioned* as a prophet, did the audience believe that Perot was a prophet? Early on in the campaign, it became clear that

Perot's message resonated with the American people, the ones responsible for the government. As noted in chapter one, Perot had a substantial lead in national polls as late as June of 1992. In one Time/CNN poll taken in early June Perot had a 13 point lead over Bush and Clinton (Duffy, 1992, p. 30).

On one hand, it could be argued that Perot was not a prophet but merely a political rogue who sought the presidency by cleverly disguising his true intentions. By playing the role of the sought, Perot could claim no need or desire to be president. He was called to do the job. While this interpretation may be true, it misses the fundamental point. Perot did, in fact, *function* as a prophet in the 1992 campaign whether he truly was a prophet or not. The important point is that the audience *believed* he was a prophet. Consequently, Perot's rhetoric must be accounted for in those terms.

As a result of Perot's appeal, President Bush and Governor Clinton suddenly became very attentive to Perot and began to position themselves with him on most of the issues. In the words of Time magazine, Perot had "the White House panicked" (Duffy, 1992, p. 30). Perot himself noted both parties' attentiveness to the movement's concerns in his resignation speech stating that both "political parties are now squarely focused on the issues that concern the American people" (Perot, 1992, p. A16). Before his reentry into the race, both Bush and Clinton sent delegations to woo Perot and his supporters (Ramstad, 1992, p. A9). After the first presidential debate, some

analysts noted that Bush and Clinton needed to "come up with a 'Perot Strategy'" (Raasch, 1992, p.A10).

However, the resonance of Perot's message could be noted far beyond the campaign and even the election. Writers Jack Germond and Jules Whitcover, in their book Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992, observed that President Clinton, in his Inaugural Address, sounded a great deal like candidate Perot:

...he (Clinton) adopted not only the deficit-cutting emphasis of that other super-salesman, Ross Perot, in his homespun 1992 romance with the "owners" of the country, but his jargon as well. In his Inaugural address, Clinton cautioned his fellow public servants not to forget "those people who toil and sweat sends us here and pays our way," and in his enthusiasm he told the voters: "You have raised your voices in an unmistakable chorus, you have cast your votes in historic numbers, and you have changed the face of Congress, the presidency and the political process itself. (1992, p.518)

The cooption of Perot's message did not stop with the Inaugural speech. They continue:

In his State of the Union speech, too, Clinton reminded the members of Congress assembled before him that they were the taxpayers' "hired hands" and that "every penny we draw" was "their money." Republicans talked about corralling the Perot voters in advance of 1996; Clinton set

out from day one of his White House tenure to do so. (1992, p.518)

Clearly, the government coopted a large portion of Perot's rhetoric. However, we are still left with the question: Did the audience believe Perot to be a true prophet? One set of answers may come from a closer examination of the themes within Perot's message in chapter three. However, one other possibility exists with respect to the audience.

### ***THE MIRACLE OF THE PROFITS***

One method of validation for prophets, aside from their public proclamations, are "acts of power" or miracles. As noted earlier, in biblical prophecy, such miracles became important means of determining whether a particular person deserved to be accorded the title "prophet". Perhaps part of Perot's attraction and ultimately the audience's attribution of the title (or the functional equivalent) "prophet" comes from the American fascination with money and millionaires.

Lewis Lapham, in his book Money and Class in America: Notes and Observations on Our Civil Religion, observes that "American faith in money easily surpasses the degrees of intensity achieved by other societies in other times and other places. Money means so many things to us - spiritual as well as temporal - that we are at a loss to know how to hold its majesty at bay" (1988, p. 213). Historically, Americans have had a love affair with money. In the United States, Lapham notes, "fortunes have their own histories. It is the money, not the achievement, that echoes

down the halls of the generations. Point out a lineal descent of Thomas Jefferson or Ralph Waldo Emerson and the fellow will scarcely merit a glance" (1988, p. 201).

Kenneth Burke, in A Grammar of Motives, argues that the monetary motive can "provide an effective technical substitute for the religious motive, as a 'symbolic' or 'spiritual' grounds of social cohesion, a means of keeping body and soul together" (1969, p. 94). Burke's point is that money can substitute for the religious function of social cohesion. In short, money has a "unifying attribute" to "which all roads lead" (1969, p. 94). Burke's observation would be true in any capitalist system but particularly so in the American system. In the American system, money has become the "technical substitute" for religion. As such, those who do not have money, worship those who do. As Lapham concludes "the American assumption that money rules the world is as fundamental among its titular enemies as among its devoted friends" (1988, p. 201). In other words, not only do we worship those who have money, we also accept the proposition that money is the fundamental goal.

In fact, the achievement of the American Dream is built upon a monetary assumption. The essence of the American Dream is success and typically that success is defined in monetary or material terms. Lapham, writing in the August 1992 issue of Harper's Magazine, notes that Americans conceive of money as "synonymous with freedom, [in] that it opens doors to feeling and experience" (p. 7). Americans, he notes, have come to "believe that if only they had twice as much money, they would

inherit the state of happiness promised them by the Declaration of Independence" (p. 7). Burke offers a similar analysis in his essay, "The Nature of Monetary Reality." He notes that "money is *not a mere agency* [italics in original], in our civilization, but is a *rationalizing ground of action*" (p. 113). In other words, money is not a component, but the foundation of civilization itself. In this system, Burke argues, "the typical apologist of ideal *laissez-faire* capitalism would think 'freedom' itself lost if we lost 'free market freedom,' since he conceived of freedom in these terms" (p. 113).

Burke and Lapham are both arguing that money, in current American culture, implies much more than simply a means to an end. In American culture, money carries a deeper spiritual meaning that eclipses the simple everyday meaning of possessing it. In such a system, Ross Perot, the simple billionaire would loom large. Why? Because, as Lapham concludes:

If even a secular religion can be defined as those sets of attitudes that people take for granted, then it is our unquestioning allegiance to the rule of money that as Americans we make good the proofs of our faith. The bottom line is the judgment of God. We find it impossible to conceive of a world in which money doesn't have the last word, and we construe the rich man as being both good and wise. (p.8)

Americans equate money with judgment. He who has money has wisdom. Perhaps the contemporary secular equivalent of "miracles" in American culture is the

acquisition of wealth. In a civil religion where a contemporary secular jeremiad would resonate, the allure of money is very powerful. Aside from Perot's rhetoric, perhaps the audience was moved to believe because Perot was the self-made millionaire who had lived the "American Dream." Todd Mason's book Perot: An Unauthorized Biography (1990) summarizes the hold that wealthy people have on Americans noting that we "have always been fascinated by men of great wealth as witness[ed] in the newsreel indulgences of John D. Rockefeller and H.L. Hunt" (p.3). Certainly, Perot's wealth, aside from his already powerful reputation, was influential in his rise to national prominence. Newspaper columnist Clarence Page writing in October of 1992 observed the connection:

...Perot has been able to finagle himself into a position of remarkable respect, ahead of all the longer tenured parties and movements. Why? The answer is a cause for national embarrassment. It is because Ross Perot is rich. Sure, it helps that Perot is white and male, too. But it really matters that he is rich. 'If you're so smart,' goes an old American rejoinder, 'why aren't you rich?' Accordingly, we Americans tend to think that, if you're rich, you must be smart or - at least - you deserve respect. (p.12A)

Undoubtedly, part of Perot's attraction came from his wealth. However, wealth is not sufficient to explain Perot's popularity in 1992. There are many wealthy people

in the United States but none of them quite have the stature of Ross Perot.

Unquestionably, none of them possessed Perot's appeal in 1992. Billionaire Steve Forbes lagging 1996 presidential campaign is evidence that more than money is needed to become as popular as Ross Perot. Forbes, like Perot is enormously wealthy. Forbes, unlike Perot does not have a message that resonates in the culture.

In effect, Perot's fortune became, for the audience, the miracle that proved his divinity. "If H. Ross Perot were a poor man," Lapham concludes, "or even a merely rich real estate developer blessed with a net worth of \$100 million, his presidential aspirations would be seen and understood as comedy" (1992, p. 7). But Perot was not poor or merely rich, he was "filthy rich." Consequently, the American people anointed Perot as their prophet and savior. Why? Because his message resonated with the people and the miracle of his fortune proved Perot was more than an ordinary presidential candidate. The combination of wealth and message created a persona that captured the imagination of the American electorate.

### ***THE SIGN OF THE ALBATROSS***

Finally, if we are to believe that Perot functioned as a prophet, then an analysis of the social conditions that made his rise possible is necessary. As noted in chapter one, the time immediately preceding the 1992 election was characterized by a sense of drift and chaos (see Gottlieb, 1992; Safire, 1992). Voters perceived a crisis and they were bent on demonstrating their anger. Tom Mathews writing in June of

1992 noted "Voters are in a throw-the-bastards-out convulsion. They are not just sending a message to Washington - it's more like an ultimatum" (1992, p.18). Perhaps Germond and Whitcover captured the feeling of the American voter in the fall of 1992 in their book Mad as Hell: Revolt at the Ballot Box, 1992:

This time around, however, the voters....had had a bellyful. They were, in one of the ever-whining George Bush's favorite phrases, 'sick and tired' of the name-calling and the finger-pointing. They wanted the issues that had reduced the quality of lives discussed and debated in the campaign. Like Howard Beale, the unbalanced television anchorman in the 1970s hit film *Network* and his aroused audience of fed-up Americans, they were proclaiming: 'We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore!' (1993, pp.15-16)

Clearly, the time immediately preceding the 1992 election was nothing short of a crisis in American political life. As noted earlier, such a time is ripe for the appearance of a prophet. In fact, usually a crisis, perceived or real, internal or external, is a fundamental social condition for a prophet's appearance.

Ultimately, the decision on a prophet lies with the audience. One method of differentiating between the true and the false prophet concerns the prophet's ability to make sense out of the current situation. One mark of the prophet is the rhetorical ability to isolate the problems facing the people in a crisis situation and provide a

sufficient explanation. Walter Shapiro, writing in Time magazine in April of 1992 noted that Perot boasted "a formidable political asset: a political bull detector that can cut through the fog of Washington-style obfuscation. His one-liners can be devastating" (1992, p. 28). William Grieder argued in Rolling Stone in August of 1992 that this was Perot's greatest gift:

His [Perot's] greatest strength as a politician is the authentic ability to articulate shared principles and perspectives ordinary people can understand and trust - free of the tricky-track language of Washington or the artful bromides designed to appease various interest groups. If that disappoints reporters, so what? People do understand where this guy stands. (1992, p. 32)

### ***SUMMARY***

Perot exhibited most of the characteristics of a prophet. He espoused a message rooted in the tradition of the culture and the social conditions at the time of the 1992 campaign were ripe for the appearance of a modern prophet. Additionally, Perot's enormous wealth contributed to the perception of divine influence. If we are to fully assess Perot's prophetic role, we must analyze his rhetorical strategies.

### ***CHAPTER THREE: ROSS PEROT AND THE CONTEMPORARY SECULAR JEREMIAD***

Although Ross Perot clearly exhibits prophetic characteristics, a determination of whether Perot truly functioned as a prophet in the 1992 campaign cannot be made without assessing his rhetoric. A prophet can claim to speak for God; a prophet can exhibit prophetic characteristics consistent with previous prophets; a prophet can exhibit an unwillingness to assume the role unless "called," a prophet can even enact miracles to prove their divinity, but ultimately the audience must attribute prophetic authority based on his rhetoric. In short, a prophet is ultimately judged on his message. What distinguishes the prophet from all others is, in the words of Lindblom (1962), "that he never keeps his experiences to himself; he always feels compelled to announce to others what he has seen and heard. The prophet is a man of the public word. He is a speaker and a prophet" (p.2). In short, a prophet is a public speaker and, ultimately, the final decision on the prophet and his message rests in the hands of the audience.

This chapter will focus on Perot's rhetorical themes during the 1992 presidential campaign. The purpose of this chapter is to ask the question: Is Ross Perot's 1992 campaign rhetoric an example of what Johannesen (1985) calls the "contemporary secular jeremiad." In order to answer the question, I will first discuss the contemporary secular jeremiad's characteristics. Second, I will examine

Perot's rhetoric for characteristics of the jeremiad. Finally, I will argue that Perot's style, notably his language usage, reinforced and enhanced his message.

### ***THE CONTEMPORARY SECULAR JEREMIAD***

Many scholars have argued for the existence of the rhetorical genre known as the jeremiad. Sacvan Bercovitch, in his book The American Jeremiad (1978) lays out the basic characteristics of a Puritan Jeremiad. He argues that Puritan colonists in the 17th century employed such a genre consisting of the following characteristics: first, the general theme of sin; second, warnings that evils will be inflicted on the sinners, third, an exhortation to repair the broken covenant; and, fourth, predictions of what would happen if the people did follow the true path. The Puritan version of the jeremiad also included the concept that Puritans were God's "chosen people." Finally, the Puritan Jeremiad, in its exhortation, usually used very figurative language in vivid descriptions of eternal damnation.

Other scholars have broadened the application of the jeremiad beyond the Puritans to include such diverse topics as protest rhetoric, presidential nomination acceptance addresses, and historical treatises. For example, David Howard-Pitney's book The Afro-American Jeremiad (1990), argues that the jeremiad has been a leading factor in black protest rhetoric. Pitney contends that Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and Jesse Jackson have all employed the Jeremiad in calling for their people to repent their sins. Ritter (1980) argues that American presidential

nomination acceptance addresses should be viewed examples of contemporary secular jeremiads. Analyzing addresses from Kennedy, Nixon, McGovern, Ford, and Carter, Ritter claims that presidential nomination acceptance speeches fulfill the same basic functions as a jeremiad. Ronald Carpenter's essay, "The Historical Jeremiad" (1976) traces the use of the jeremiad in historical treatises. Using three historical examples, Alfred Thayer Mahan's The Influence of Seapower upon History, Mackinder's The Geographic Pivot of History, and Frederick Jackson Turner's essay The Significance of the Frontier in American History, Carpenter argues that each rhetor is, in essence, constructing a jeremiad where each sees that there is a calamity at hand but that the audience has a way out if they will just follow the right path.

Building upon previous analyses (Ritter, 1980; Friedenber, 1980), Richard Johannesen's article (1985), "Jenkin Lloyd Jones and the Contemporary Secular Jeremiad," argues that Jones' speech "Who is Tampering with the Soul of America" should be viewed as a "paradigmatic case" of the contemporary secular jeremiad. Johannesen argues that the contemporary secular jeremiad genre has transcended the Puritan jeremiad. He contends there are four characteristics to the contemporary secular (modern) jeremiad.

First, Johannesen notes that "a civil religion of the American Dream has replaced the Puritan religion" (p. 160). Ritter (1980), notes that "the Puritan's

carefully proscribed religion has been replaced by the ambiguities of a civil religion - the American Dream." "Its sacred texts," he argues "are no longer the words of Jeremiah and Isaiah, but those of Jefferson, Lincoln, and even Harry Truman. In short, the scriptures have been replaced by a rendering of the national past"

(p.158). Johannesen argues that the American Dream has become the foundation for current social and political arguments. "The past values, ideals, principles, and achievements," he argues, "that now collectively constitute the American Dream serve as the grounding for arguments and appeals..." (1985, p. 160). Ritter (1980) offers a similar analysis:

Those who employ the modern jeremiad must justify their vision not in terms of Biblical events, but in terms of the American past. The jeremiad stands as a bridge between the past and the future, charting the course to future glory by calling for fidelity to old ideals. As a result, contemporary political rhetoric in the jeremiadic tradition necessarily involves an interpretation of the meaning of the American heritage. (p.164)

The jeremiad unifies past and present by requiring that current political discourse be interpreted and judged in terms of past political principles and ideals.

A second characteristic is the contemporary secular jeremiad's depiction of "Americans as unique or 'chosen' people" and the envisioning of "America as a promised land with a special destiny" (p. 160). These two concepts are reflected in

discourse which represents Americans and America as somehow special or unique. This characteristic is usually represented as a "special calling and special trials leading to a new Promised Land" (Johannesen, 1985, p. 160). Herman Melville's novel White-Jacket is an example of this concept. He writes:

We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark. . . . God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. (1990, p.153)

The third characteristic of the contemporary jeremiad is the transformation of biblical sacred texts into contemporary equivalents and the reservation of a hallowed place for sacred leaders. The contemporary jeremiads use the sacred texts as a yardstick. Johannesen explains:

Contemporary secular jeremiads give meaning and significance to

the present by contending that today's public policies must measure up to past ideals. These past ideals manifest themselves in the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and the words and actions of the Founding Fathers and other revered past political greats such as Lincoln.

(1985, p. 160)

Not only are the texts used as a yardstick for public policy, they also are used as a focal point for renewal. Johannesen argues that "it is to these 'sacred' texts of political 'scripture' that 'after errant wanderings we return again and again in order to renew ourselves'" (1985, p.160).

In addition to sacred texts, contemporary secular jeremiads also mythologize the Founding Fathers. Through successive generations, the Puritans slowly "elevated the Puritan founding fathers to heroic, almost mythic, status" (1985, p. 160). The net effect of this elevation in the period following the Revolutionary War was the transformation of "the revolutionary Founding Fathers, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution into secular equivalents of sacred personages and scripture" (1985, p. 160).

Finally, the fourth characteristic of the contemporary jeremiad is a theme of sin and repentance that follows in the footsteps of the Puritan jeremiad. Johannesen (1985) argues there are two versions of the American Dream: the moralistic and the materialistic. The moralistic version concerns God-given rights while the

materialistic version's "bedrock is the Puritan work ethic" (p. 161).

The moralistic version of the jeremiad stresses Puritan virtues of cleanliness and order "to return to ways promoting health growth" (Johannesen, 1985, p. 161). This version represents societal ills as a form of sin requiring repentance. Johannesen explains that "present societal ills or the crisis situation at hand are depicted as urgent, as requiring action, redemption, and reform before it is too late, as representing the verge of impending doom" (p.161). Viewed as a sign of "breaking [the] commitment to the fundamental principles of the American Dream," the straying from tradition, however, is "represented not so much as an irrevocable and fatal error but more as an opportunity for greatness and a test of national character" (1985, p. 161). Ultimately, the current crisis can be solved and "America still can achieve its destiny of greatness" if only the citizens "will repent and return to the values, principles, and traditions that made them a 'chosen' people" (p.161).

The essence of the materialistic version are the basic values underlying the Puritan work ethic. Johannesen explains that the "primary values include effort, persistence, initiative, self-reliance, achievement, material success, competitiveness, and self-interest" (p.161). The basic premise underlying the materialistic version is "the free enterprise economic system" which serves as "a 'sacred' exemplar of freedom from controls and constraints that retard individual

upward mobility in the socio-economic hierarchy" (1985, p.161).

A secondary feature of the jeremiad is the combining of lamentation with optimism. Like the Puritan jeremiad, "the modern jeremiad both laments America's present condition and celebrates the prospect of its ultimate fulfillment. It glorifies America's special status as man's 'last best hope,' and constantly warns Americans of "their failure to live up to that ideal" (Ritter, 1980, p. 159). Those who employ the jeremiad lament current societal problems, typically in great detail, but their handwringing is tempered by optimism about the future and its possibilities. Johannesen argues that "lamentation of present ills is balanced with depiction of America's glorious past and potentially bright future" (1985, p.161). Ritter concludes that this combination of lamentation and optimism is "consistent with the jeremiad tradition" (1980, p. 160).

In summary, the contemporary secular jeremiad replaced the Puritan religion with a civil religion of the American Dream. Americans are depicted as the "chosen people" on a special mission (destiny). The jeremiad elevates America's mythic past by revering sacred texts (i.e. the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence) and sacred leaders (Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln). In the tradition of the Puritan version, the contemporary secular jeremiad follows a basic theme of sin and repentance. This characteristic is at the core of the jeremiad because, fundamentally, a jeremiad concerns a covenant among the people and the

sin against, or breaking, of that covenant. The jeremiad identifies the sin against the covenant and calls for repentance from the congregation who have strayed from the true path. In essence, the jeremiad calls for a return, a restoration, to the time before the sin; to a time when the covenant was still intact. Finally, the jeremiad laments current problems but combines the lamentation with optimism about the future. As Ritter (1980) concludes, the jeremiad "helps Americans to find a common cultural memory which unifies the past and future" and whose function "is to promote cultural cohesion" (p.169).

### ***ROSS PEROT'S RHETORIC***

An examination of Ross Perot's rhetoric finds some striking similarities to a contemporary secular jeremiad. Initially, Perot's rhetoric consciously reflects the American dream. The term "American dream" can be found consistently in Perot's rhetoric. Perot, in this respect, is not unique. Many political candidates, particularly presidential ones, reference the American Dream or refer to sacred leaders and sacred documents. However, beyond the presence of the term, Perot explicitly recognizes that he is the embodiment of the American dream. The reentry speech is illustrative:

Few people in this country have been able to live the American dream to the extent I have. No person ever had a finer father, mother or sister than I. No man has ever been blessed with a better wife, Margot, or five more

outstanding children plus six grandchildren - too good to be true. I have been extremely fortunate during my business career. So I have lived the American dream." (Perot, 1992 p.15) ·

In addition to providing the embodiment of the "Dream," Perot uses the American dream as a link between the mythic past and present problems. Therefore, his rhetoric also fulfills the function of invoking the civil religion. Ritter argues that the American Dream is at the heart of political persuasion:

Ironically, a rhetoric which is born of often bitter political campaigns ultimately serves to unite the American audience through a celebration of its unique place in history. Contemporary political rhetoric does not merely make an obligatory reference to American ideals; the very nature of the jeremiad places the American Dream at the heart of the persuasive effort. (1980, p. 169)

For Perot, unity between Americans is necessary to save, and ultimately, to pass on the dream. For example, in the first presidential debate, Perot observed the need for unity:

See, our differences are our strengths. We have got to pull together. In athletics we know it. See, divided teams lose; united teams win. We have got to unite and pull together, and there's nothing we can't do, but if we sit around blowing all this energy out the window, on racial strife and

hatred, we are stuck with a sure loser. (Perot, 1992, p. A16)

In his reentry speech, Perot explicitly provides not only the link between unity and the American dream, but between unity and the future:

When I think of all the sacrifices my parents and all the generations who came before them made in the earlier times for us so that we could live the American dream, certainly we all dedicate ourselves to seeing that you, the young people in our country, will have the American dream passed on to you. (Perot, 1992, p. A20)

Virtually the same statement can be found in the first presidential debate. Perot, speaking of the World War II generation, noted that "we owe you a debt we can never repay and the greatest repayment I can ever give is to recreate the American dream for your children and grandchildren" (Perot, 1992, p. A17). In short, what Perot seeks is a return, a recreation of America's mythic past. Lawrence Wright, in The New York Times Magazine in June of 1992, notes Perot's America, when he writes:

For a minute, let's step back into that Rockwell picture, into the perfect America that means so much to Perot, the mythic America he wants to recreate....Norman Rockwell's vision of America...depicted a new Eden and lived in the minds of millions of people. He saw Americans as a race of angels. Rockwell's iconography became a template for the movies and

television sitcoms of the 50's, before America began to turn its head to the glamour, sophistication and secularism of the Kennedy era. Ross Perot never made that transition, "That is my life!" he insists.... (p. 46)

Bercovitch argues that the Puritan jeremiads also sought a return to the past.

However, the purpose of invoking the mythic past in the New England jeremiads, was "not merely to elicit imitation but above all to demand progress" (1978, p. 24).

The Puritan jeremiad, in short, used the mythic past to move toward the future. In a similar vein, Ritter argues, the contemporary jeremiads function to link the mythic past, that Perot desperately wanted to revisit, and the problem-ridden present.

"Modern jeremiads," he writes, "insist that Americans must fulfill the promise of their forefathers; they must, in George McGovern's words, 'come home to the affirmation that we have a dream...that we can move our country forward, ...that we can seek a newer world'" (1980, p. 168).

Perot's linkage between past, present, and future, coupled with the need to reform, was all found later in the reentry speech. Specifically addressing senior citizens, Perot said, "I know you share my commitment to make sure that we pass the American dream on to our children and grandchildren" (Perot, 1992, p. A20). Perot's concession speech provided an additional example of a vision of progress achieved by an adherence to the values of the American past:

This is the time to redouble our efforts and work with the new

Administration to make sure our country is a beacon to the rest of the world, to make sure our cities, our alabaster cities that gleam undimmed by human tears. And to make sure that every little child across America is only limited by his or her dreams and their willingness to do - pay the price and make the effort to make those dreams come true. That's what America is all about. (Perot, 1992, p. B5)

The first presidential debate provided a prototypical example of this appeal. Linking the deficit with the possibility of losing the dream, Perot sought to establish the causal link for the audience. He stated that "an incredible number of young people are active in supporting my effort because they're deeply concerned that we have taken the American dream from them" (Perot, 1992, p. A15). In the third presidential debate, Perot's conclusion utilized the American dream as a motive for his presidential campaign. Addressing students in the audience, Perot said "I'm doing this [running for president] for you. I want you to have the American Dream" (Perot, 1992, p. A23). Even a cursory examination leads to the conclusion that the "American dream" was a central theme of Perot's campaign rhetoric as it appears in virtually every speech.

Perot's rhetoric also featured the jeremiadic characteristic of the "chosen" people. The most representative example can be found in Perot's basic stump speech. Perot asked, "Is there any reason why we cannot outcrank, outcreate, and

outwork anybody, anywhere in the world, and beat them in economic competition?" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Perot clearly viewed the American people as a special breed of people. Later in the speech, Perot argued for America's international superiority, stating that "we've been the best in the world in a lot of things, and we can be the best in the world" (p. A18). Speaking directly to the American people, Perot linked the idea of the "chosen people" with the concept of the "dream" stating, "We can make this country anything we want it to be because of a very, special magic dream" (Perot, 1992, p. A18).

The third characteristic of contemporary jeremiads, sacred texts and sacred leaders, was also present in Perot's rhetoric. Although Perot references these texts and leaders, they were not as prevalent as his use of the other jeremiadic characteristics. Explaining his decision to withdraw from the campaign to his supporters, Perot explicitly used terminology associated with sacred texts and leaders, stating, his "memories will be focused on you and your greatness, because you are America. And I am certain that the Founding Fathers would be very proud of you" (Perot, 1992, p. A16). The theme was sounded again in his concession speech: "You've done an incredible job of getting this country turned back around to the type of country our founders established, a country that came from the people"(Perot, 1992, p. B5). In the first presidential debate, Perot referred to sacred documents in order to justify his campaign: "This is a movement that came

from the people. This is the way the framers of the Constitution intended our government to be, a government that comes from the people" (Perot, 1992, p. A14).

The fourth characteristic, sin and repentance, is also present in Perot's rhetoric. As noted earlier, sin and repentance is usually represented by the lamentation of present ills balanced with optimism. This lamentation was typically discussed in terms of America straying from traditional principles. Portrayed as a crisis situation, the straying from fundamental principles is not "presented as a fatal error, but as a test of national character" (Ritter, 1980, p. 160). However, the test requires that we repent our sins and return to the proper path.

Clearly, Perot believed there had been a sin and he believed that the sin was at a critical stage. In the first presidential debate, Perot placed the lamentation in the urgent terms of a crisis situation:

Every time our interest rates go up one percent, that adds 28 billion to the deficit or the debt...We are sitting on a ticking time bomb, folks, because we have totally mismanaged our country and we had better get it back under control. Just think, in your own business, if you had all your long-term problems financed short term, you'd go broke in a hurry.

(Perot, 1992, p. A15)

A touchstone example of this rhetorical strategy was found in Perot's first

infomercial:

Our great nation is sitting right on top of a ticking time bomb. We have a national debt of four trillion dollars. 75% of this debt is due and payable in the next five years. This is a bomb that set to go off and devastate our economy and destroy thousands of jobs....I have spelled out a solution that will fix this problem starting now....I will deal head on with these problems. I will fix these problems. Cast your vote for your children.

(Perot, 1992, p. A17)

The third presidential debate provided another example of Perot's lamentation. Perot argued that the way to solve the country's problems was a return to the traditional principles upon which the country was founded.

...in a nutshell we've got to reform our government or we won't get anything done...We have a government that doesn't work. It's supposed to come from the people; it comes at the people. The people need to take their government back. You've got to reform Congress. They've got to be servants of the people. You've got to reform the White House. We've got to turn this thing around.... (Perot, 1992, p. A23)

### ***PEROT'S STANDARD CAMPAIGN SPEECH***

Although individual elements of the contemporary secular jeremiad can be found in every Perot speech, I will consider one of Perot' speeches in detail to

determine if there are patterns in a single speech that represent Perot's entire rhetorical effort. In other words, is it possible to find in a single Perot speech all of the elements to classify Perot's rhetoric as a contemporary secular jeremiad?

Perot's standard campaign, or stump, speech appears to be an appropriate artifact for analyzing his rhetoric. The speech, as transcribed by The New York Times, was delivered at a rally in Olympia, Washinton on July 2, 1992. As claimed by the Times, "the content is representative of the standard speeches that Mr. Perot gives to his supporters around the country" (1992, p. A18).

The speech is similar in most respects to virtually every other Perot speech as the basic strategy of the speech is lamentation combined with optimism. Perot placed the issue of the country's problems squarely in front of his audience. Using rhetorical questions as examples, Perot asked the audience whether they were prepared to accept defeat.

Can you live with the fact that this great country is now the most violent, crime-ridden society in the industrialized world? Are you ready to get rid of the bars on the windows, the bars on the doors? Can you live with the fact that we've got 5% of the world's population and 50% of the world's cocaine use? Can we agree that we will never win an economic competition, we will never have the best public schools, and we will never have safe neighborhoods unless we get rid of drugs? (Perot, 1992, p. A18)

This particular passage represents the Puritanical strain of the American Dream identified by Novak (1974). Perot lamented the ills of society, specifically linking them with the use of drugs which clearly violates the Puritan virtues of health, cleanliness, order, and self-discipline. Throughout the speech, Perot deplored America's fall from grace. Perot implored the audience to agree that the country had problems. He asked rhetorically:

Can we agree that we have work to do? Is there anybody out there that's not willing to put his or her shoulder to the wheel and do it? Is there anybody here that can live with the fact that we are no longer the No. 1 economic superpower in the world?

This passage represents the materialistic version of the American Dream identified by Fisher (1973). In the materialistic version of the Dream, according to Johannesen, "the bedrock is the Puritan work ethic." The "primary values include effort, persistence, initiative, self-reliance, achievement, material success, competitiveness, and self-interest. The free enterprise system serves as a 'sacred' exemplar of freedom from controls" (1985, p. 161). Perot clearly believed in this vision as he referenced putting "the shoulder to the wheel" and lamented the loss of America's status as the "No. 1 economic superpower." At several points in the speech, Perot referenced hard work and effort noting that the United States was "competing in an economic Super Bowl" and "that if we [were to] get off our seats

and get in the ring. [sic] you and I can make the words 'made in the U.S.A' once again the standard of world excellence" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). In fact, Perot isolated putting "America back to work" as the most important item on his agenda for renewal claiming that if that did not happen, then "all these other things we want to work for are academic" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). At one point, Perot simply declared "we've just got to go to work, and I'm certain that you'd join me with that" (Perot, 1992, p. A18).

Balanced with this lamentation of the country's ills is Perot's optimism. Early on, Perot suggested that it was "time to come and rebuild America" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). He noted that the road would be difficult but that Americans were up to the task, he stated that "We'll need the strong to do all this. But you have done a brilliant job" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Additionally, Perot linked the idea of optimism to America's peculiar status as chosen people. He noted that Americans have "been the best in the world in a lot of things, and we can be the best in the world" and that there is no reason that "we cannot outcrank, outcreate and outwork anybody anywhere in the world" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). He spoke of the pioneer's creed and the American dream noting that "it took tough, hard people to create this country, and it's going to take tough, hard people to go from \$4 trillion in debt to passing on the American dream to our children" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Perot observed that "We can make this country anything we want it to be because of a

very special, magic dream" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Clearly, Perot was invoking the dream as a grounding for his arguments. At one point in the speech, he explicitly noted the American dream and its unique responsibility. He declared:

And if you think about this great country, let's all do whatever it takes, whatever it takes to pass the American dream on to our children. Our parents worked and sacrificed for us, and most of our dreams far outstripped anything we thought we would accomplish as children. It's a special obligation we have to pass on to the next generation. (Perot, 1992, p. A18)

Undoubtedly, Perot lamented the problems the country faced yet he linked the problems with optimism about the future; he noted that Americans possessed unique attributes which would allow them to succeed and he tied it together with the concept and the responsibility of the American dream.

Perot also represented his movement as grass roots noting that the people had "reminded the people in Washington that you own this country" and that the November election was to be an election that came "from the people and not at the people from Washington" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). He reminded his audience that they "had literally changed the political process" and that "we've gone back 200 years to a point where the people in Washington are your servants" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Curiously, there was no mention of the Founding Fathers or of the sacred documents such as the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. However,

as noted earlier, there were several references in the speech to America's status as a chosen people.

Finally, the speech is peppered with plain talk as Perot used colorful references and metaphors to make his point. As noted earlier, Perot used sports metaphors such as the Super Bowl and boxing. Additionally, Perot used other metaphors noting that the country "didn't need any morning glories that wilted by noon," and, in referencing the grass roots movement of his organization, he referred to a "blizzard of petitions never seen before in the history of the country" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Perot also made use of colorful expressions imploring the audience to rebuild the country to have "alabaster cities that gleam undimmed by human tears" and Perot concluded the speech by quoting lines from The Sound of Music: "Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, until they find [sic] their dream" (Perot, 1992, p. A18).

In summary, Perot's standard stump speech contains most of the elements of a contemporary secular jeremiad. The speech referenced the civil religion of the American dream and spoke of Americans as chosen people. Additionally, the speech lamented current problems but combined the lamentation with optimism about America's future. As noted earlier, most of those elements appear in other Perot speeches. In fact, the jeremiadic references are even more commonplace in the Presidential debates and Perot's infomercials which occurred much later in the

campaign.

Comparing Perot's pre-withdrawal rhetoric and his post-withdrawal rhetoric reveals three significant differences. First, at this point (the July stump speech) in the campaign, Perot had not yet crystallized the issue of the debt as the sin for which he sought atonement. Nor had he linked the issue of the debt with extinction of the American dream. Second, there are only hints of Perot's antigovernment message sprinkled throughout the speech. At several places, Perot hinted that government was partly to blame noting that the election in November should come from "the people and not at the people from Washington (Perot, 1992, p. A18). However, Perot was not as clear in developing this message until much later in the campaign.

Third, Perot's isolation of the blame for the country's problems is, at least implicitly, fixed upon the people. Perot noted that "we've got a country all split up by race, religion, [and] various beliefs. Can we agree that we are all in this together as a team" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). At several points in the speech, Perot implored his audience to get involved in their country. Perot asked rhetorically "Does everyone understand that you cannot elect someone and send that person to Washington and have that person do it for you? O.K. You [the audience] are going to have to stay deeply involved at the local, county, state and national level" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Concluding the speech, Perot noted that "If you've got an elderly

neighbor down the street who's an invalid, get the neighbors down there to pick up the house, cut the grass and look after that person. Don't just count on some government agency do do it" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Although Perot does not explicitly blame the audience, the tone of his message suggests that the audience is responsible for at least some of the problems facing the country. At this point in the campaign, Perot had yet to shift the blame from the people to the government. However, the basic theme of sin and repentance, of lamentation and optimism is a constant in all of Perot's rhetoric from beginning to end.

### *A CONTEMPORARY SECULAR JEREMIAD?*

These examples demonstrate that Ross Perot engaged in a rhetoric of lamentation that, at the same time, was balanced with optimism about the future. Further, Perot's rhetoric was consistent with contemporary secular jeremiads. Perot's rhetoric reflected the civil religion of the American dream. He depicted Americans as the chosen people and his rhetoric referenced sacred leaders and sacred texts. Finally, Perot portrayed the straying from traditional principles (the sin) in crisis terms. He argued that this straying could only be resolved by returning to those traditional principles (repentance) and to the fidelity of past ideals.

For Perot, the sin is the debt. Our collective irresponsible spending via the government now threatens the covenant - our sacred heritage. Perot's jeremiadic message is that we have violated the covenant and we must repent to restore the

convenant. The difficulty is that Perot's rhetoric strategically does not place responsibility for the sin upon the people. Rather, as noted in chapter two, Perot takes explicit pains to claim that government, *not* the people, are the ones who have strayed from traditional principles (sinned). An example of this strategy was found in Perot's reentry speech. Combining elements of optimism with concern about present ills (specifically the government), Perot sought to crystallize the issue of sin and repentance for voters:

The American people are good. But they have a government that is a mess. The American people are concerned about this government they pay for that doesn't produce results....The American people are really concerned about a government where people go to Washington to cash in and not serve....The people know that it is wrong to spend our children's money. Nothing could be more wrong. We know that we cannot constantly pass on a \$4 trillion debt to our children....The people are concerned that our government is still organized to fight the Cold War....Not only is government a mess, politics is also a mess. The way political campaigns are run is also a mess. (Perot, 1992, p. A20)

Perot made it clear that government, not the people is the culprit. If we examine the characteristics of jeremiadic discourse, it becomes clear that the concept of sin and repentance is necessary for classification as a jeremiad. Perot is the scolding

prophet, a voice in the wilderness, but he is not scolding the congregation.

Why does Perot separate the people from the government in terms of sin? Most likely because it is politically expedient to do so. This strategy allowed Perot to place the blame on someone other than the people but asked the people for the necessary change. Perot was smart enough to know that blaming the people for the problem was a poor political strategy. Jimmy Carter experienced a similar problem when he implored the people to avert the energy crisis. Carter argued the people were responsible for the crisis and, as such, they were the ones to repent. While Carter may have been true to the jeremiadic form; politically, it was a bad idea. In a similar fashion, Perot distinguished repentance from sin. The people had, in fact, sinned. However, for political reasons, the culprit was the government and Perot's solution to the country's ills was a vote for him.

What Perot had, in effect, done was scapegoat the government for the sin committed by the people. Kenneth Burke, writing in A Grammar of Motives, describes the function of scapegoating. He notes that the scapegoat "is profoundly consubstantial with those, who looking upon it as a chosen vessel, would ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own iniquities upon it" (1962, p. 406). Burke concludes that the scapegoat performs "the role of vicarious atonement" by alienating "their iniquities upon it, and so may be purified through its suffering" (p. 406). The end result is the purification of the persecutors

whose "purified identity is defined in dialectical opposition to the sacrificial offering" (p. 406).

A true jeremiad would have directly confronted the people with their sin. It would have argued that the people were responsible for the government and, consequently, the problem. A genuine jeremiad would have scolded the people for their actions in contributing to the problem. However, for strategic reasons in order to get elected, Perot ingratiated himself with his audience (the people) by shifting the blame from the people to the government. Perot scapegoated the federal government for problems created by the people. At that point, Perot had moved beyond the jeremiad. He had, in effect, left the role of the prophet and adopted the role of the savior. Perot realized that the people were willing to accept a general level of blame but they were not ready to accept full responsibility for the problems plaguing the country. As a result, the federal government became a convenient scapegoat for the problems Perot isolated.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argue in "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," that the "concept of a genre as a constellation of fused elements refines the notion that, in a genre, the significant rhetorical similarities outweigh the significant differences" (1978, p. 23). Although his rhetoric demonstrates *most* of the characteristics associated with a contemporary secular jeremiad such as chosen people, civil religion of the American Dream, and

sacred texts and personages, Perot's separation of sin and repentance prevents a classification of his rhetoric as jeremiadic. Perot's rhetoric might be labelled a quasi-jeremiad but it cannot be properly classified as a true jeremiad. In Perot's case, the rhetorical differences outweigh the rhetorical similarities. I will explore the question of the transition from the sacred to secular and Perot's separation of sin and repentance in more detail in chapter five.

### *STYLE AND ROSS PEROT*

One of the most notable aspects to Perot's campaign rhetoric was his style; his folksy, pithy language that set him apart from Clinton and Bush and labelled Perot as the anti-politician. Perot presented himself as everyman. Germond and Whitcover labelled Perot a "walking man-in-the-street, and every sentence and sound bite he uttered established that identity" (1993, p. 17). Johannesen (1985) notes that Jenkin Lloyd Jones employed stylistic devices such as personification, similes, metaphor, alliteration, parallel structure, and colloquial phrases (pp. 166-168) that strengthened and reinforced his message allowing him to "paint vivid pictures of America's moral problems" (P. 170). In much the same way, Perot used common language, colorful expressions, and vivid metaphors to reinforce and underscore his message.

The most apparent stylistic trademark of Ross Perot in the 1992 election was his plain talk. One element of Perot's plain talk was his lack of introductory

remarks. Typically, he launched directly into the main point of his speech. Perot began his NAACP speech in Nashville by stating, "I love this country. I love the principles it's founded upon. I don't like to see those principles violated" (Perot, 1992, p. L23). Another example can be found in Perot's reentry speech. Like his NAACP speech, he got right to the point. He began by stating "the volunteers in all 50 states have asked me to run as a candidate for President of the United States" (Perot, 1992, p. A20).

Additionally, Perot's speeches consistently made use of common, ordinary language. Perot's reliance on pronouns, simple vocabulary, contractions, and interjections all contribute to the perception that Perot was just an ordinary citizen who engaged in plain talk. The first presidential debate provided an example of Perot's use of pronouns when he said, "we've got to clean this mess up, leave this country in good shape and pass on the American dream to them. We've got to collect the taxes to do it. If there's a fairer way, I'm all ears" (Perot, 1992, p. A15). In one short paragraph, Perot used eight pronouns. Pronouns, such as "we" and "them" implied that the audience recognized who Perot was referring to; therefore Perot spoke to the entire American electorate as if he was speaking to a group of locals at a small cafe in Texarkana. He assumed the audience knew the identity of "we" and "them."

Nor did Perot use an extensive vocabulary. Instead of utilizing exact words

to delineate meanings, Perot employed colloquial phrases to explain problems. In the first presidential debate, Perot spoke of how it was "time to pay the fiddler" while he admonished those who "don't have the stomach to fix" problems (Perot, 1992, p.A15). In his standard stump speech, Perot made frequent use of contractions such as "don't," "let's," "we'll," and "can't," and interjections such as "see," "now," and "O.K." (1992, p. A18). The combination of contractions and interjections gave Perot the appearance of an ordinary man who was discussing problems with his fellow citizens rather than a politician pontificating to the electorate. Clearly, Perot's plain talk, either in content or form, reinforced his message.

Perot himself was conscious of his common speech. In his standard stump speech, Perot explicitly noted for the audience that he was phrasing his message in "plain talk": "As far as I'm concerned, if we don't rebuild our industrial base or, in plain Texas talk, we don't put America back to work, well, all these other things...are academic" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Discussing his first infomercial, Perot indicated that he had ad-libbed at times, using down-home homilies to drive home his point (Associated Press, 1992, p. A9). The New York Times observed that Perot, in his first infomercial, "relied on his most dependable political asset - his gift for plain talk and homespun anecdotes" (Sack, 1992, p. A16). Similarly, writer Chuck Raasch observed that the first presidential debate was a "night without

real surprises, except for the effectiveness of Ross Perot's homespun grit" (1992, p. A10). Writer Jane Ely noted that Perot's folksy simplicity seemed rather new and refreshing" (1992, p. 16A). The question of what made Perot "folksy" is another matter. In addition to this simple language, colorful expressions and metaphors certainly added to the perception of Perot as "the man-in-the-street."

Perot's use of colorful expressions became a trademark. Perhaps his most famous use of colorful phraseology occurred during the first presidential debate. Answering a question on how he would work in the Washington environment, Perot responded by attacking the established, entrenched interest groups. In particular, Perot turned his wrath upon lobbyists stating, "all these fellows with \$1,000 suits and alligator shoes, running up and down the hall of Congress, that make policy now...we're going to get rid of them" (Perot, 1992, p. A17). Later in the same debate, Perot's description of drug dealers turned colorful. Summarizing the need for action, Perot lamented that drug dealers are "guys that couldn't get a job, third shift in a Dairy Queen" who were "driving BMW's and Mercedes selling drugs. And these old boys are not going to quit easy" (Perot, 1992, p. A16). Early on in the debate, Perot insisted that his solutions would require sacrifice, stating, "I'm not playing Lawrence Welk music tonight" (Perot, 1992, p. A15). Discussing proliferation in the Middle East, Perot labelled it a "five-star migraine headache down the road" (Perot, 1992, p. A15). In the second debate, Perot noted that he

was a man of action, stating that he would "go crazy sitting up there slow-dancing" (Perot, 1992, p.14).

Perot's most obvious use of metaphorical images revolved around the crisis he saw the country facing. His description of the debt as a "ticking time bomb" (Perot, 1992, p. A17) was a representative example of crisis description through metaphor. Another example was found in the third debate where Perot, in discussing the budget, made extensive use of a hospital metaphor. Claiming that "our challenge is to stop the financial bleeding," Perot explained that "If you take a patient into the hospital that is bleeding arterially, step one is to stop the bleeding. And we are bleeding arterially" (Perot, 1992, p. A20). Later in the debate, he addressed financial concerns, using a heart metaphor. He stated, "if you have a heart problem you don't wait until a heart attack to address it" (Perot, 1992, p. A20). In the second debate, Perot turned his attention to lobbying, noting that visitors should wear their "safety-toe shoes" when visiting Congress to avoid a trampling at the feet of lobbyists (Perot, 1992, p. A13). Later in the same debate, Perot used carpenter imagery, exhorting the public to "measure twice and cut once" in reference to Social Security (Perot, 1992, p. A13).

Perot's unity theme consistently employed sports metaphors. The NAACP speech spoke of how a "divided team loses" and a "united team wins" (Perot, 1992, p. L23). Answering a question on politics in his reentry press conference, Perot

made use of a boxing metaphor, proclaiming "it's a tough game...there are no Marquis of Queensberry rules..." (Perot, 1992, p. A20). In his standard stump speech, Perot referred to competition in "an economic Super Bowl" and that "if we have an athletic team of geniuses that was all divided up, they'd lose..." (Perot, 1992, p.A18).

### *SUMMARY*

In summary, Perot's rhetorical themes closely resembled that of a contemporary secular jeremiad. He consistently invoked the civil religion of the American Dream. Beyond Perot's conscious recognition that he embodied the dream, Perot used the dream as a link between America's mythic past and our current problems. Perot invoked the dream as a unification device by linking the debt (a current problem) with the possible extinction of the dream (a legacy of our past). Additionally, Perot's rhetoric also represented Americans as the "chosen people" while references to sacred texts and sacred leaders were also present in the discourse. Finally, Perot's rhetoric featured a combination of lamentation about America's present with optimism about America's future. However, Perot's strategic placement of sin upon the government rather than the people preclude labelling Perot's rhetoric as a true jeremiad. In addition to the themes displayed in the rhetoric, Perot's style underscored his message. Perot's common language, colorful expressions and metaphors enabled him to create a down home style that

served to reinforce his message and contributed to the perception that Perot was literally one of "us."

## *CHAPTER FOUR: SUCCESS AND FAILURE*

### *PROPHECY AND THE QUEST FOR THE PRESIDENCY*

At the beginning of this study, I sought to answer a basic question on Ross Perot's 1992 quest for the presidency: What made Perot such a popular figure? Although a large number of factors can, and must, be attributed to Perot's popularity, I have argued that two factors in particular contributed to Perot's astounding run at the presidency: Perot's prophetic characteristics and his use of rhetoric similar to a contemporary secular jeremiad. To explain Perot's success as well as his failure requires an examination of how these factors worked together. The answer to both questions lies neither solely in the speaker nor his message but in their connection.

Part of Perot's success can be explained by the unique combination of speaker, message, and medium. First, Perot created prophetic authority which stemmed, in part, from his personal embodiment of the American dream. As a result, the audience attributed to Perot prophetic ethos; consequently, the Perot phenomenon was born. Second, Perot's message, which closely resembled a contemporary secular jeremiad, combined with Perot's prophetic ethos in a perceived crisis situation established a connection with the American public. Perot appeared to articulate a coherent vision of America's future in the face of a perceived crisis. In addition, Perot's masterful use of the television medium added

to his ethos and message, enabling him to reach a much wider audience than traditional presidential candidates in a shorter period of time.

Perot's failure can also be explained, in part, by examining the connection between speaker and message. Initially, I will argue that Perot failed because of damaged ethos. Perot's on-off-on campaign severely damaged his credibility. Given his role as prophet, this damage was fatal. Second, Perot's perceived paranoia also contributed to his failure. The appearance of a man obsessed with conspiracies and given to investigating others created enough doubt in the electorate's mind to prevent Perot's election.

Additionally, Perot's position as a third party candidate also contributed to his failure. While Perot's perceived status as an outsider was a distinct advantage in 1992, it also denied Perot the basic advantages of a traditional party candidate. Perot had no access to party funds, infrastructure, or organization. Beyond Perot's inability to access the funds and structure of the major parties, Perot was also at a disadvantage because of the psychological handicap of third-parties. Typically, Americans are reticent to vote for a candidate that they perceive cannot win the election. The so-called wasted vote argument became a disadvantage for Perot in 1992 primarily because of "Duverger's law" which maintained the duopoly of the two-party system (see Abramson, et. al., 1995). The presence of Duverger's law and Perot's status as an outsider required that Perot maintain his ethos and furnish

solutions to the problems he isolated. Consequently, Perot's rhetorical themes, although a factor in his success, also contributed to his failure. Combining a message that lacked specific proposals with a speaker relying solely on his ethos to persuade the public to vote for a third-party candidate proved to be disastrous when questions concerning credibility arose.

### ***THE SPEAKER: PEROT THE PROPHET***

The first part of Perot's success can be found in Perot himself. As I argued in chapter two, Perot possessed all of the characteristics of a prophet and, as a result, he was able to establish prophetic ethos. As discussed in chapter two, the prophet can be broadly defined as someone who espouses a conservative message, consciously speaks to the people from God, and believes that he has been sent by God.

Perot clearly met the criteria necessary to be considered a prophet. He espoused a traditional back to basics message, a return to the mythic Rockwellian world where America still held hope and promise. Perot's message centered on the breaking of the covenant and for the restoration of that covenant. To justify his presidential campaign, Perot lamented that he really did not want the job. He was only running for president for "the people." Perot did not seek, he was sought. It seems clear that Perot matched most of the basic characteristics necessary to be considered a prophet.

However, as I also noted in chapter two, the basic requirement for prophetic consideration is audience acceptance. The audience has to believe that the speaker is truly a prophet or there is no prophetic authority and hence, no prophetic ethos. A large portion of Perot's prophetic authority comes from his message (which I will examine in more detail in the next section). However, some elements of his ethos are extra-rhetorical. As I noted in chapter two, one of the signs that a speaker is truly a prophet is the presence of supernatural confirmation. Supernatural confirmation provides the audience with evidence that the speaker is truly a prophet. H. Mark Roelofs, in his article, "The Prophetic President: Charisma in the American Political Tradition," argues that this characteristic is more critical to a prophet's credibility than his identification with the people. He explains that "of far more importance than these mutual identifications between the leader and his people is the capacity of the heroic leader to demonstrate his exceptionality, his heightened powers." The source of this capacity "comes from the revelation of his extra-human relationship to the divine" (Roelofs, 1992, p. 6).

In Perot's case, as noted earlier, money appears to be one of those factors. Perot's rags-to-riches, Horatio Alger story became the basis for Perot's can-do reputation and the subsequent attribution of prophetic authority by a public that seems enraptured by silver and gold. R. W. Apple, writing in The New York Times, argued in October of 1992 that Perot retained his "valuable political assets,

notably the American fascination with billionaires who thrust themselves among the spotlight, especially self-made ones" (p. A1). For the American public, Perot's phenomenal wealth was a sign that he was called to be more than an ordinary person. It was a sign of the divine.

However, balanced with this supernatural ability is the sense that the prophet is essentially an ordinary person. Prophets were typically thought of as ordinary people who had a "divine call." Frank Seilhamer, in Prophets and Prophecy, argues that except for a few prophets, the rest "as far as we know, were laypeople" (1977, p. 5). Roelofs places this characteristic in presidential terms:

He [the prophetic leader] will come to this capacity in part if, while obviously an exceptional, powerfully dramatic person, he is nonetheless clearly identified with the people on an intimate, personal level. The intersubjective relationship here must be warm and substantial. The prophetic leader must demonstrate personal, intimate understanding of the people's hopes and sorrows, of their songs and sagas, of their communal myths and their meanings. There has to be obvious evidence that his life and their lives, their vitalities, their souls flow in one stream, one life. (1992, p. 6)

Clearly, Perot's use of language functioned to identify with the people. His "plain talk" connected with the ordinary citizen. As noted in chapter three, Perot made

extensive use of metaphors, colorful expressions, contractions, interjections, pronouns, colloquial phrases and simple language to convey his message to the American electorate. The effect of this strategy was to reinforce Perot's image as an outsider, an average person, one of "us."

A typical example of Perot's "plain talk" occurred in the third presidential debate. Responding to a question on automobile fuel efficiency standards, Perot laments that "everybody's nibbling around the edges; let's go to the center of the bull's-eye." Placing the question in the larger context of NAFTA, Perot used one of his more famous phrases of the 1992 campaign:

You implement that Nafta, the Mexican trade agreement, where they pay people \$1 an hour, have no health care, no retirement, no pollution controls, etc., etc., etc., and you're going to hear a giant sucking sound of jobs being pulled out of this country right at a time when we need the tax base to pay the debt, and pay down the interest on the debt and get our house back in order. (Perot, 1992, p. A21)

This particular example of Perot's rhetoric displays most of the stylistic devices that enabled the man-in-the-street to identify with Perot. The vocabulary is common, the language is colorful, the structure is simple. The combined effect is to make Perot, the exceptional billionaire, appear to be Perot, the ordinary person fulfilling Roelof's second condition for prophetic acceptance. The prophet must appear

exceptional and, at the same time, appear to be one of the people.

Perot's plain talk corresponds to a prophet's ability to articulate a crisis confronting the community. The stylistic devices employed (consciously or not) by Perot contributed to the perception that he was one of "us" who had been dragged unwillingly into the fray by the "call" of the people to confront the crisis at hand. More importantly, the audience believed that Perot had an articulate vision for the perceived crisis. Germond and Whitcover explain that "when he [Perot] talked about 'cleaning out the barn' or 'looking under the hood,' listeners understood what he was saying" (1993, p.215). Perot's rhetorical strategies, both in style and content, combined with his can-do reputation, created a prophetic persona that was perfect for the perceived crisis of 1992.

However, the attraction to Perot may be more complex than "Americans are in awe of money," or Perot was one of us who talked "plain talk." The attraction to Perot extends beyond the myth, the money, the message, or the "plain talk." The argument is deeper; it finds its roots in the American identity. I believe that part of Perot's message (and as a consequence, Perot's power) can be found in his embodiment (or enactment) of the "American dream." Although it also functions as part of his message, I believe the power of the dream message took on a new import given the speaker. When Perot speaks of having "lived the American dream," I believe he is speaking not only to the American public but to the greater

mythic identity of the American citizen.

To explicate this argument, we must first turn to the defining characteristic of what makes someone an American? Perry Miller, in his essay "The Shaping of the American Character," argues that being an American fundamentally means that one is extremely self-conscious. Describing Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Miller states, "This episode in the history of the text [revisions of the poem] is only one of a thousand which underscore that quality in Leaves of Grass that does make it so peculiarly an American book: its extreme self-consciousness" (1967, p. 2).

Attempting to explain the source of this self-consciousness, Miller argues that it lies in America's anxious nature:

Whether the American public dislikes Whitman or is indifferent to him, still, in this respect he is indeed the national poet....So, if we examine closely this quality of Whitman's awareness...we are bound to recognize that it emanates not from a mood of serene self-possession and self-assurance, as Whitman blatantly orated, but rather from a pervasive self-distrust. There is a nervous instability at the bottom of his histrionic ostentation - an anxiety which foreign critics understandably call neurotic. In fact these critics, even our friends, tell us that this is precisely what Americans are: insecure, gangling, secret worriers behind a facade of braggadocio, unable to live and let live. (1967, p. 3)

Americans are not comfortable with who they are and are not satisfied with what they have become. The fundamental reason behind this hidden anxiety, Miller argues, is that we are a work in progress. Our search for an identity is really what makes us American. Because we, as Americans, are an unfinished canvas, we are extremely insecure about our nature. Miller explains:

Americans, particularly from the early nineteenth century on, have been in search of an identity. "The Englishman," says the writer [article on conscience of a people that Miller is discussing], 'takes his Englishness for granted; the Frenchman does not have to be constantly looking over his shoulder to see if his Frenchness is still there.' The reason for this national anxiety is that being an American is not something to be inherited so much as something to be achieved. This, our observer concludes, is a "complex fate." (1967, p. 3)

The practical result of this search for identity is an obsession with becoming. We are constantly looking to the future because that is where America really exists. Clearly, we have a past and we pay homage to it but only as a foundation to the act of becoming. James David Barber, writing in The Pulse of Politics (1980), also argues that America is a nation of the future. We are a nation, he notes, that tells our story "again and again in periodic celebrations and in pilgrimages to the shrines that mark heroic deeds." We search for our "present meaning in a version of the

past, in our roots as we want to remember them." He concludes that "even more powerfully in America...we hold to the sense that the national story continues in the adventures of the future. From the start, we have been a people about to be, a nation of comers" (1980, p. 311). For Barber, this quality resides in American optimism that we are our own makers. In other words, we are constantly in a state of becoming by our own hand. He concludes:

Whether in shock or satisfaction, Americans tune in to the new - and thus the news - to catch the sound and shape of the next episode, lest we be left behind as the country moves forward. And with an optimism absurd to the Old World sophisticates and determinists, we democrats - those who demand a return to a better past and those who insist on an advance to a better future - cling to the faith that we ourselves are the makers of our destiny. That faith falters from time to time, but then spring up again. "In God We Trust," yes, but we The People are the authors of liberty. (1980, p. 311)

Bercovitch (1978), discussing the Puritan "errand," concurs with this analysis. Specifically, he argues that the errand is the progress that we, as a nation, sought and still do seek. We are never satisfied with what is, we must always seek more. For Americans, the state of unfulfillment is the norm because it ensures that we, as Americans, will still pursue the errand. He explains:

...the nature of the errand goes far toward explaining the distinctive form and function of the American Puritan jeremiad....The American Puritan jeremiad was the ritual of a culture on an errand - which is to say, a culture based on faith in process. Substituting teleology for hierarchy, it discarded the Old World ideal of stasis for a New World Vision of the future....The European jeremiad also thrived on anxiety, of course. Like all "traditionalist" forms of ritual, it used fear and trembling to teach acceptance of fixed social norms. But the American Puritan jeremiad went much further. It made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. The very concept of the errand, after all, implied a state of *unfulfillment* [italics in original]. The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England's Jeremiah's set out to provide a sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome. (p. 23)

Miller, Barber, and Bercovitch appear to argue that the condition of unfulfillment is not only unique to America but is America. This observation has two important implications for this study.

First, this endemic dissatisfaction explains the power of Perot's view of sin and repentance. Perot declared that the sin was directly jeopardizing the possibility for American advancement otherwise known as the American dream. For Perot, the

sign of the sin was obvious: the debt. A probable reason for his preoccupation with the debt/deficit issue is Perot's business experience. In fact, many Perot supporters pointed to his business background as his unique qualification for the presidency. An editorial in The Houston Post is a good example. Listing reasons Perot should be elected, the writer begins with Perot's business acumen stating, "He [Perot] knows how to run a business and look out for the bottom line. The United States is a business. Perot understands the terrible portends of a runaway national debt..." (Lary, 1992, p. A17). Perot himself called attention to his business qualifications in relation to the other candidates by asking the rhetorical question, "If I ran a small business, if I had a small business, would I hire either one of these guys [Bush and Clinton] to run it?" (Holmes, 1992, p. A14). Clearly, Perot's business background can explain why he concentrated on the deficit issue. For Perot, the federal government's financial state was shocking. However, Perot's business background does not explain why Perot used the language he did to link the deficit with the American theme.

The link between the debt and the dream is a function of Perot's message. In short, Perot's message of runaway debt does not possess power unless he links the debt with extinction of the dream, or what makes America. Early in the campaign, Perot did not establish this link. However, after Perot's return from hiatus in July of 1992, the link between the debt and the dream was a consistent feature of his

rhetoric. Perot stated in his reentry speech, "The people know it is wrong to spend our children's money....We know that we cannot constantly pass on a \$4 trillion debt to our children" (Perot, 1992, p. A20). His concession speech provided another example. Perot, speaking to his volunteers, stated that their mission has been "to take the country back and give it to the people, to pay its debt, to pass the American dream to our children..." (Perot, 1992, p. B5). In the second presidential debate, Perot explicitly linked the sin (the debt and the deficit) with risking the dream:

When I was a boy it took two generations to double the standard of living. Today it will take 12 generations. Our children will not see the American dream because of this debt that somebody somewhere dropped on us.

(Perot, 1992, p.A11)

Later in the same debate, Perot noted that the debt threatened the opportunity for the dream:

But I want all the children - I want these young people up here to be able to start with nothing but an idea like I did and build a business. But they've got to have a strong basic economy. And if you're in debt, you're - it's like having a ball and chain around you. (Perot, 1992, p. A13)

This linkage was a constant in Perot's rhetoric. For him, the threat, the crisis, is the deficit and the national debt. However, the debt is more than a mere problem, it

is truly a sin that threatens the dream. For Perot, the debt is a symbol of our recklessness and mismanagement of our children's future. By arguing that we, as a nation, threatened to destroy the American dream, Perot was not just arguing that our children's and grandchildren's future would be more difficult (a powerful argument in its own right), he was arguing that we would literally destroy America. If we cannot achieve, we are not American. We cannot inherit America, we must work for it.

Bercovitch (1978) concludes that to "declare oneself the symbol of America is by definition to retain one's allegiance to a middle-class culture" (p. 181) If we become stagnant at a stage, if we lose the process and the errand becomes unfulfilled, we then lose the dream. We lose what it means to be American; we lose our identity. This analysis explains why Perot's message centered upon the sin of the debt and the deficit. In Perot's eyes, this sin threatened the dream more than anything else.

Second, Perot, who embodied the dream, achieved a greater degree of prophetic ethos because he invoked (as a rhetor), and enacted (as a businessman), what it meant to be an American (the dream - the work in progress). In other words, another speaker could have invoked the American dream couched in terms of sin but the results would not have been as fruitful. Perot's combination of prophetic ethos and quasi-jeremiadic message worked together to create his unique

appeal. As noted earlier, Perot appeared to be the exceptional billionaire who had lived the American dream but, at the same time, appeared to be one of the people who was tired of "politics as usual."

A large portion of Perot's prophetic ethos comes from his ability to articulate a message that reverberates in the audience. Prophets are able to articulate the problems that we face. Perot possessed this quality. Todd Mason (1990) explains that "Perot's ability to state the problem, to articulate our vague dreads, leaves us gasping and willing to follow his lead" (p. 9). Typically, this message is in response to a perceived crisis and as explained earlier, prophets typically appear in time of crises. Perot's deficit message, phrased in crisis terms, reverberated in the minds of the American electorate. Roelofs (1992) argues that this quality is essential to presidential leadership:

...the prophetic leader can now force upon his people their moment of choice. They have come this far in their history, they have achieved what they have, because they have been true to their natal commitments and loyal to their god of destiny who has been with them in all their trials. But now troubles heap up on every hand. There has been a falling away of commitment, a weakening of identity, a dispersion of social and psychic energy, a loosening of community. The patriarch demands the people's attention, that they meet the need to choose again the objects of their

highest loyalties....Or, on the contrary, they can choose to go their separate ways, to abandon their founding commitments, loyalties, and social meaning. (p. 7)

Although Roelofs does not use the language of the jeremiad, his analysis of prophetic leadership centers on the ability of the prophetic leader to articulate the crisis facing the people and present them with an alternative to avoid impending doom. In other words, the people have sinned, and they must repent their sins to return to the proper path. For Perot, the sin is the debt; the consequence is loss of the dream.

### ***THE MESSAGE: THE POWER OF THE JEREMIAD***

As noted in chapter three, Perot's rhetoric closely resembled a contemporary secular jeremiad. I have argued earlier that Perot's scapegoating of the federal government prevents classifying Perot's rhetoric as a true jeremiad. However, the lamentation of present ills, especially the debt/deficit, combined with an optimistic view of the future, the use of sacred texts such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, the portrayal of America as the "chosen" land and Americans as the "chosen" people, and the invocation of the American Dream as civil religion, all served to strike a chord with the American public. The power of this appeal lies in American identity.

The power of Perot's rhetoric results from a combination of timing, form

and content. Jeremiads generally depict societal ills in crisis terms and prophets tend to appear in moments of crisis. Thus, we can explain part of Perot's effectiveness from his timing. Perot's political jeremiad was the right message at the right time. However, a strategy depicting a crisis situation and the litany of ills facing society would not have been as successful as Perot's quasi-jeremiadic message. The jeremiad possesses multiple characteristics which function together as a unique cluster. The power of the jeremiad comes from lamentation **and** optimism. The American public would not have accepted a message that possessed only one of the characteristics.

The unification function, the promotion of social cohesion, of the jeremiad; the linking of the past and the present, the combining of present ills with optimism about the future, is an essential feature of the jeremiad. Without it, the rhetoric loses its appeal. Ritter explains that "the modern jeremiad helps Americans to find a common cultural memory which unifies the past and the present. It allows Americans to celebrate their glorious heritage and their ultimate destiny even as they lament their present shortcomings" (1980, p. 169). In other words, if we only lament, we surrender the glorious past. Perhaps the best example of linking the mythic past with the sin of the deficit and the promise of the dream can be found in Perot's standard stump speech:

It took tough, hard people to create this country, and its going to take

tough, hard people to go from \$4 trillion in debt to passing on the American dream to our children. When you think about this, think about the pioneer's creed. You're all the way out West, you hit the Pacific.

The people who brought you here were tough people. Their creed was the cowards never started, the weak died on the way, and only the strong survive. We'll need to be strong to do all this. But you have done a brilliant job. (Perot, 1992, p. A18)

Perot's linkage of lamentation and optimism was a necessary component of his political jeremiad. Perot could not lament the nation's ills without providing an optimistic vision of the future. Speakers that engage in lamentation without optimism employ what Bercovitch (1978) calls the "anti-jeremiad" (p. 191). He describes the anti-jeremiad as "the denunciation of all ideals, sacred and secular, on the grounds that America is a lie" (1978, p. 191). Those who employ the anti-jeremiad do not accept the mythic elements of the American past and the civil religion of the American Dream with its promise of restoration and hope. In short, the anti-jeremiad laments current societal problems, denies past successes, and is pessimistic about future possibilities. However, this was not an option for Perot. Because Perot was the embodiment of the "dream", he had to both lament problems and maintain optimism about the future. If Perot was to be a prophet calling for a return to the past, he had to believe in that past. Because he was a product of the

mythic past, because he was the embodiment (something that he consciously noted) of the dream, for consistency's sake, he had to pay homage to the dream with optimism about America's future.

It is important to note that modern prophets operate within the system. The biblical prophets were literally voices in the wilderness. Contemporary prophets are "voice in the wilderness" who "at the same time was a part of the community" (Ritter, 1980, p. 157). Ritter notes that this distinction between the biblical prophets and those who employ contemporary jeremiads is crucial:

One must appreciate that the modern jeremiad is not presented by a genuine Jeremiah. The old prophets literally were voices in the wilderness; they were apart from society. The Puritans who presented jeremiads had already lost the detachment of the prophets, for they function within their society. (1980, p. 161)

Although Perot fit the criteria to be considered a prophet, he, like the Puritans before him, functioned within the society he critiqued. Although he attacked the establishment, Perot had been a part of the establishment most of his adult life. From his earliest years to his run for the White House, Perot had strolled the corridors of power in the United States. Not only did Perot wield considerable political power but, of course, he carried a big stick in economic circles. Germond and Whitcover explain Perot's insider status:

...Perot, far from being the Washington outsider he claimed, with nothing but contempt for establishment politics, had been - as Solomon [Associated Press reporter in Washington] wrote - "the ultimate insider." Solomon quoted former Richard Nixon White House aide Peter Flanagan to that effect, and another Nixon White House hand, convicted Watergate figure Charles Colson, called Perot "an amazing operator," unmatched in his ability "to muscle himself in quicker [than others] into the president's own confidence." (1993, p. 308)

However, as we noted in chapter two, Perot possessed the characteristics of a prophet. To some extent, he was a voice in the wilderness in that he sought a return, a restoration of the American myth, but he continued to be a part of the society he chastised. Perot wanted to return to the time of Norman Rockwell, to the America that was his life. Bercovitch (1978), discussing nineteenth century writers, argues that this is a fundamental characteristic of the American jeremiad. He notes that "for our classic writers," the symbol of America "functioned as an ancestral taboo, barring them from paths that led beyond the boundaries of their culture" (p. 180). Bercovitch argues that the American dream inspired the writers "to defy the false Americanism of their time" but also "compelled them to speak their defiance as keepers of the dream" (1978, p. 180). What better description could have been written about Ross Perot? Perot was both a product of and keeper of the dream.

Perot, as a product of the dream generates prophetic authority; Perot as keeper of the dream generated prophetic ethos. In short, the American public believed Perot both because he came out of the dream and, at the same time, sought to preserve that dream. Bercovitch concludes that "what distinguishes the American writer - and the American Jeremiah from the late seventeenth century on - is his *refusal* [italics in original] to abandon the natural covenant" (1978, p. 181).

### ***THE MEDIUM: PEROT'S USE OF TELEVISION***

In addition to his prophetic ethos and jeremiadic appeals, Perot also used the television medium as no other candidate had before. Much has been written about the 1992 campaign. A great deal of the analysis has centered on the expansion of the role of the media, particularly the so-called alternative media, in the campaign. The most obvious example was Perot who announced his candidacy on Larry King Live and essentially ran his campaign on television. Tom Rosenstiel, writing in his book Strange Bedfellows: How Television and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992, noted that Perot's "emergence was about more than people's alienation and anger." In fact, Rosenstiel writes, "How he rose was equally significant. When the process and the press failed to meet with America's concerns, a new structure, and a new media, now existed to broach it instead" (1993, p. 164).

Perot thought that the best way to talk about the issues was via television

and the alternative media. Tom Luce, Perot's friend and confidant, explained "that what Ross thought was important was to talk about issues and communicate about issues. Ross was continuing to do that every time he appeared on television....Ross always felt that when he was appearing on television, talking directly to the American people, that was the way to campaign" (Germond and Whitcover, 1993, 356). In fact, Perot was "enthralled with television" (Germond and Whitcover, 1992, p. 320), because he recognized the unique power of the television to reach a wide audience. Larry King explains Perot's thinking:

"If you speak to a thousand people a night [sic] seven nights a week,"

Perot says, "it takes you about three years to talk to a million [people].

So on shows where you get twenty and thirty million people, some of these huge shows, you realize the multiplier effect you can create just with one short comment like that - a nationwide reaction. And that the power of television does not exist in any other medium." (1994, p. 76)

Perot, ever the businessman, figured out that the air time was free and you received more exposure for your dollar. Using Larry King with his paid television slots, Perot essentially ran his campaign on television. Steven Holmes, writing in The New York Times, argued that television "was the medium that sired and nurtured his independent campaign" (1992, p. A1).

In addition to his frequent appearances on talk shows, Perot began his series

of paid political commercials or infomercials. Perot used television for eight programs, averaging a 9.1 Nielsen rating representing thirteen million viewers for each program (Carter, 1992, p. A14). Perot's ratings were just below the average for the three major networks and in one case, according to The New York Times, Perot outdrew a major league baseball playoff game (1992, p. A30). Bill Carter of The New York Times wrote, "In a format he [Perot] all but invented, the paid political program, Mr. Perot was a remarkably consistent television performer" (1992, p. A14). The use of television talk shows and alternative media enabled Perot to reach a wider audience in a shorter time span than conventional campaign methods. Germond and Whitcover conclude that "talk show television to an unprecedented degree enabled the candidates...to tap directly in to the voters' frustration over having lost an effective voice in the political decisions that affected their lives, and to give it an outlet" (1993, p. 514). Perot was at the forefront of using the media for campaign purposes.

### ***WHY DID PEROT FAIL?***

Given some of the reasons for Perot's success, now the question may be asked: Why did he fail? Clearly, a great many factors must be accounted for in explaining the failure of Ross Perot's presidential campaign. My purpose is not to argue that Perot's failure can be explained solely by examining his rhetoric or his assumption of the prophetic role. As noted earlier, Duverger's law and Perot's

status as a third-party candidate can be offered as major reasons that Perot was denied the White House in 1992. However, if I am correct in assessing the power of Perot's political jeremiad and his assumption of the prophetic role as partial explanations for why he was so popular in 1992, then it may be possible to explain Perot's failure, in part, in the same terms.

Given recent political events, some may argue with the premise that Perot failed. Certainly, he would quarrel with the assessment of failure. Perot's political summit in Dallas in August of 1995 attended by every contender for the 1996 Republican nomination, his entry into the debate over the future of Medicare, and his announced formation of a third political party in September of 1995 can all be offered as evidence that Perot still wields a great deal of political clout. The "Revolution of November, 1994" may be taken as more evidence that Perot's message actually took hold. Additionally, as noted in chapter three, other candidates in the 1992 presidential field began to sound suspiciously like Perot, including President Clinton in his inaugural address. However, the premise of the question lies not in political power but, rather, in election results. In other words, the question is: Why wasn't Perot elected President of the United States in 1992?

As noted in chapter one, he seemed to have every possible advantage except that he did not belong to an established political party. I have argued earlier in this study that Perot's role of a prophet accounts for his extraordinary popularity. The

audience, in effect, attributed prophetic ethos to Perot. Additionally, Perot's message reinforced Perot's role as the "voice in the wilderness" calling the congregation back from its path of sin. These two factors, prophetic ethos and his quasi-jeremiadic message, combined with Perot's use of the television medium at a time when the country found itself in a perceived crisis can account for Perot's extraordinary popularity.

I believe there are two areas that require examination. First, Perot's temporary assumption of the prophetic role ultimately doomed his campaign. I will argue that Perot's assumption of the prophetic role and his subsequent abandonment of that role destroyed any prophetic ethos that he had initially established with his audience. Second, Perot's rhetorical themes fulfilled their function, but that function was not sufficient or appropriate for a presidential campaign. In other words, Perot's political jeremiad was appropriate for rallying the public, or what Roelofs calls the "legitimation" function, but it was unsuited for winning a presidential campaign.

### ***PEROT'S PROPHETIC ETHOS?***

Initially, Perot's election failure can be partially explained by his absence of prophetic ethos. Because the assumption of the prophetic persona was so powerful, it is obvious that its loss is equally devastating. The most obvious blow to Perot's ethos came from his decision to withdraw from the campaign in mid-July.

Speculation runs rampant on why Perot left and then reentered the race. Supporters argue that Perot sought to focus the issues upon which the presidency should be decided. Detractors argue that Perot did it to sabotage President Bush's re-election chances. William Randolph Hearst Jr. argued in October of 1992 that it was "no secret that Perot re-injected himself into the presidential race because the president was beginning to narrow the poll gap between himself and Clinton" (1992, p.3F).

The reasons for Perot's reentry are not nearly as important as the reasons for his withdrawal. Here, the evidence is not as clear. Many argue that Perot withdrew to avoid intense media scrutiny. Even those who had followed Perot believed this to be his true motive (Germond and Whitcover, 1992, p. A33). In an attempt to avoid media attention, attention that clearly annoyed Perot and substantially derailed his campaign, Perot deliberately pulled out of the race with every intent of reentering the race as an "October surprise." In Perot speak, he couldn't stand the heat so he got out of the kitchen. Perot's stated reason, the revitalization of the Democratic Party, struck many as hollow. Germond and Whitcover, writing in their book, comment:

His [Perot's] reasons were so farfetched that we [Germond and Whitcover] were moved to write from New York: "If Ross Perot were Pinocchio, his nose would be growing all the way from Dallas to here after the whopper he unleashed on the country to explain why he was leaving millions of

dedicated volunteers in the lurch. (1993, p. 371)

Furthermore, the lack of substantial reasons seriously damaged Perot's credibility, particularly with his supporters who reacted with shock and anger to his announcement. The New York Times described the reaction of Perot supporters "who greeted the news with dismay" as lamenting that "Perot was our only hope." In fact, the "the cynicism over politics as usual that fueled the Perot drive could still be heard" in the "voices of his disappointed backers (1992, p. A13). Most supporters said "they felt betrayed by the man they thought was their knight in shining armor" (Harper and Housel, 1992, p. A1). When asked at his withdrawal news conference how he would respond to the charge that he was a quitter, Perot said: "People can say anything they want to say. I'm trying to do what's right for my country. Now, that probably makes me odd in your eyes, but that's why I'm trying to do" (1992, p.A16). Perhaps Ed Rollins, Perot's former campaign manager, best summarized the effect of Perot's decision. Declaring that Perot characterized himself as a non-politician who would add courage, do the will of the people and run a world-class campaign, Rollins added that "he [Perot] did none of the above and is perhaps the last person in America to understand just how low his credibility as a public figure has sunk as a result" (1992, p. 25A).

Certainly, the loss of credibility would be damaging to any presidential contender. However, in Perot's case, the damage was irreversible. Credibility is a

necessary component for any speaker, particularly someone who seeks the presidency of the United States. However, given Perot's unique status as a third-party candidate, his assumption of the prophetic role, and the nature of his message, the decision to withdraw was disastrous. As noted earlier, Perot faced systemic and psychological handicaps due to his third-party status. A third-party candidate fighting an uphill battle to win the presidency can ill-afford a broadside to his credibility the likes of which Perot experienced by pulling out of the race in July of 1992. Beyond the immediate damage to Perot's credibility, the decision to withdraw confirmed what his detractors had said all along, and what his supporters could not believe to be true, Perot was no prophet. An editorial in The Houston Post summarized (in prophetic terms) the effect:

His [Perot's] withdrawal from the presidential race was as if Moses had led the children of Israel into the wilderness, then gone up on the mountain and not come back with the Ten Commandments and led them on to [sic] sight of the Promised Land. Imagine how the Israelites would have felt - shocked, disbelieving, disappointing, disgusted, disillusioned, angry. The same list of emotions applied to the more than 4 million Perot backers who've been helping put his name on ballots in state after state as a independent candidate for president. (West, 1992, p. A27)

The use of a prophet to illustrate the point was probably closer to the truth

than the writer might have imagined, but the point is well taken. A true prophet would not be half-hearted in his message. A true prophet would not experience the "call" in a part-time manner. A true prophet would be able to withstand the hardships resulting from speaking the Lord's word. Sheldon Blank, in Understanding the Prophets, argues that a difficult life is characteristic of prophets. He writes that "communication is difficult and the life of the prophet is not easy. We find many bitter words spoken by such prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel..." (1969, p. 44). Imagine Jeremiah throwing in the towel. One either is or is not a prophet. Although Perot is a secular rather than sacred prophet, the expectation is still the same. There is no in-between. Because the electorate thought Perot was a prophet, his decision to withdraw from the campaign destroyed his prophetic ethos. Perot's decision made him, for the first time, seem very human. In short, Perot "lost the biggest issue in every presidential campaign: trust" (Bernstein, 1992, p. 2C). Not only did Perot lose credibility, he lost his standing as a prophet. Phrased another way, Perot lost not only one of Aristotle's three modes of persuasion but what Aristotle called "the most effective means of persuasion he [the speaker] possesses" (McKeon, 1941, p. 1329).

Proof that Perot functioned as a prophet can be found in another aspect of his public persona, his raging paranoia. H. Mark Roelofs explains how paranoia is a characteristic of prophetic leadership:

The problems center on the leader's ego, on the twin claims he [the prophetic leader] must make in order to be, uniquely, the spokesman of the whole people and bearer of their true, assembled enthusiasms and, at the same time, to be, again uniquely, the voice of god to the people. These are inherently difficult and dangerous claims....All too often they are to be filled by pure faith, love and hope, anger and fear, by daring, exalted intuition. Combinations such as these make for high drama, and, almost as certainly, for extremes of paranoia and megalomania. (1992, pp. 8-9)

Clearly, Perot suffered from such paranoia. The best evidence of this paranoia can be found in Perot's investigations of enemies and friends alike. The stories on spying that surfaced in the national media were the beginnings of "Inspector Perot." As early as May of 1992, stories began to appear indicating that Perot had, for years, investigated business associates, enemies, and the like. In May of 1992, Richard Connor, publisher of The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, "charged that Perot in effect tried to blackmail him back in 1989 after the paper ran articles critical of his son's management of the airport" (Shapiro, 1992, p. 31). The Wall Street Journal argued in June of 1992 that beyond the can-do reputation, "there is a flip side to Perot, [the] captain of industry, [he] is also Ross Perot, super-cop and super-sleuth" (Rogers and Abramson, 1992, p. 1). The sleuthing, the Journal continued, went "well beyond run-of-the-mill background checks." In fact, Perot's

"penchant for intrigue, plus a strict moral code and a fierce competitiveness, have led him to authorize investigations that...included videotaped surveillance of individuals, sometimes to probe for marital infidelities" (Rogers and Abramson, 1992, p. 1)

Perot was convinced that the negative stories were generated from Republican "dirty tricks." Germond and Whitcover note that "the prevalence of negative stories fueled fed Perot's deep conviction that the Republican Party and the Bush White House were out to get him" (1993, p. 308). The continual assault on Perot from the Bush camp and Republicans only fed Perot's conviction. In fact, the Perot camp was convinced they were witnessing the "Son of Willie Horton - the full-blown rebirth of the intentional, carefully orchestrated negativism of the 1988 Bush campaign" (Germond and Whitcover, 1993, p. 352).

Perot lashed out at the Republicans in late June, accusing Vice-President Dan Quayle of making remarks about him that "Hitler's propaganda chief would be proud of" (Noah and Rogers, 1992, p. A18). The scenario became even more bizarre after Perot's reentry into the campaign. In an interview on CBS's 60 minutes, Perot claimed that he had dropped out of the race in July because "the Republican Party planned to release a doctored photograph of his daughter, Carolyn, and to disrupt her August wedding" (Freemantle, 1992, p. 1). The Bush campaign responded by calling Perot a "crazy man" and indicated he was suffering

from "delusions" (McDonald and Freemantle, 1992, p. A1). Perot's accusations of Republican "dirty tricks" paralleled Perot's increasingly strained relationship with the press. In particular, ABC news aired a story challenging whether there had been an assassination attempt on Perot in the early 1970s as claimed in Ken Follet's account On Wings of Eagles. Perot bristled at the story and the subsequent grilling by the media. Perot stormed into a press briefing held by his son to angrily deny the story. "The moment," Rosenstiel notes in Strange Bedfellows, "perfectly captured Perot's attitude about the media. When confronted that a major part of his biography was contradicted by proven facts, he challenged the press's right to ask" (1993, p. 337). At the same time, additional stories began to surface about Perot's history of conspiratorial accusations (Associated Press, 1992, p. 4A).

The effect of these charges and stories were especially damaging to Perot. First, Perot appeared to have no evidence. Second, the charges of "dirty tricks," coupled with Perot's history of surveillance, led to labels of "Perot-noia" and worse. Third, when questioned about contradictions in his story, Perot claimed the media was part of the conspiracy. The net effect of the conspiracy charges led most people to wonder about "Perot's composure" since most of the charges did not "seem exactly credible" (Hanchette and Sharpe, 1992, p. A8). Perot's charges raised questions about his own credibility. An editorial in The Houston Post summarized Perot's problem:

It is hard to imagine that happening [supporters returning to the fold].

At a time when the polls showed that Perot was being taken seriously again by a lot of Americans, he pulled something like this that further drained his credibility. Perot may think he is hurting George Bush with his latest allegations, but he is only hurting himself. (1992, p. A14)

There is no clear evidence of an orchestrated campaign to smear Perot on the part of the Republicans. The Republicans maintained that there was never any directive to get Perot. Charles Black, a chief Bush strategist, argued that the media was more responsible for the negative impression of Perot than the Republican Party, claiming, "It was more like 80 percent the press, with us stoking the fire as we could" (Germond and Whitcover, 1993, p. 351). "If the press had a victim," Tom Rosenstiel notes, "it was Perot, not Bush. Over the years, the Texas Magnate had created so much inflated mythology about his life that he had reason to be fearful. The press could unmask the parts of the myth that were false" (1993, p. 335).

The combination of Perot's reputation as a "super-sleuth" with his unsubstantiated charges of "dirty tricks" led to the perception of a paranoid Perot hardly suitable for the highest office in the land. Thus, although Perot possessed the characteristics of a prophet, his off-again, on-again campaign coupled with his paranoia destroyed what prophetic ethos he may have possessed.

## *THE CONTEMPORARY SECULAR JEREMIAD:*

### *PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC?*

Another problem that plagued Perot was, ironically, his use of the political jeremiad, which, in many respects, became his undoing. Ritter (1980) argues that a speaker in a contemporary political jeremiad will assume the role of the prophet temporarily. He explains that "the presidential candidate can use his party's ritual celebration - the national convention - to assume temporarily the role of prophet and to warn that America is backsliding" (Ritter, 1980, p. 161). However, "once the need for restoration" has been established, "the means of attaining these ideals becomes obvious" (Ritter, 1980, p.161). Perry Miller observed this distinction between Puritan and modern jeremiads:

We hear much talk nowadays about corruption, most of it couched in generalized terms. If we ask our current Jeremiahs to descend to particulars, they tell us that the republic is going on the rocks, or to the dogs, because the wives of politicians aspire to wear mink coats and their husbands take a moderate five percent cut on certain deals to pay for the garments. The Puritans were devotees of logic, and the verb "methodize" ruled their thinking....When the synod felt obliged to enumerate the enormities of the land so that the people could recognize just how far short of their errand they had fallen, it did not, in the modern manner, assume

that regeneration would be accomplished at the next election by turning the rascals out. (1980, p. 161)

The assumption of the contemporary secular (modern political) jeremiad is that the solution to the ills identified merely requires the public to vote out the old and vote in the new. "Regeneration" is accomplished by "turning the rascals out." In this case, Perot said Americans could solve their problems by voting out gridlock and voting in Perot. The mechanism for such action is not discussed nor delineated in any detail in his contemporary jeremiad.

However, critics assume that the contemporary secular jeremiad is employed in a context where it is possible to assume rather than specify solutions. In other words, the audience should repent. But how? In a contemporary secular jeremiad, the method of repentance is never specified. In almost all cases where the jeremiad is employed, the solutions are self-evident. The audience knows what to do. An example is Ritter's (1980) identification of presidential nomination acceptance addresses as analogues to modern political jeremiads. In this case, the nomination acceptance addresses assumes the specific solution. The speaker need not specify an action for the audience. However, in the heat of a modern presidential campaign, specific solutions are a prerequisite for candidates. It is simply not enough to note a problem on the horizon. A modern presidential candidate must provide some specific means of coping with that problem. In short, the candidate cannot offer

himself as the obvious method of repentance.

As noted earlier, a candidate cannot offer themselves as the answer to the problem; this is particularly true for a third-party candidate who does not have the psychological luxury of major party status. In other words, a third-party candidate already is handicapped because the electorate does not believe he or she can win the election. In Perot's case, this difficulty was compounded by his complete lack of political experience. As a result, it became necessary for Perot to lay out, in detail, what he would do to solve the problems. The audience could vote for a candidate as a method of repenting but that vote would have to be for a candidate that furnished specific solutions to the problems identified and whose ethos was undamaged. Perot's damaged ethos and lack of specifics made this strategy problematic. In many respects, Perot's ability to articulate problems damaged him when the time came for articulating solutions. Consequently, Perot's use of the political jeremiad would have been better suited to a nomination speech or an acceptance address rather than the specificity necessary in the rigors of presidential campaigns.

One of the primary criticisms of Perot's campaign was this lack of specificity. Germond and Whitcover explain:

As the weeks flashed by, however, Perot found himself increasingly pressed on the talk show circuit to get beyond the clever one-liners and sound bites of the sort he continued to decry from the "politicians," and

spell out exactly what he had in mind to end the recession and eliminate the nation's staggering deficit. When he did use hard figures and they were questioned, he would duck, or promise an explanation later. (p. 307)

A.M. Rosenthal, writing in The New York Times in April of 1992, noted that Perot needed to give the American people "clarity of intention" on his solutions to the problems facing the country (1992, p. A23). A basic characteristic of Perot's speeches is the lamentation of ills without specifics about solutions. In essence, Perot delivered problem-solution speeches without the solution. Perot's standard stump speech was a litany of the problems facing the country. However, the suggested solutions were not specific. Proclaiming the need to "rebuild the industrial base," and to put "America back to work," Perot's suggestion consisted of getting people "register[ed] to vote" (Perot, 1992, p. A18). Clearly, voter registration was not sufficient in terms of specificity for dealing with the problems he delineated. Once again, Perot offered no specifics on how the problems could be solved. In the second presidential debate, Perot was asked how he would break gridlock in Washington. He responded, "Well I've listened to both sides and if they would talk to one another instead of throwing rocks. I think we could get a lot done" (Perot, 1992, p. A12).

In the third debate, Perot, addressing issues that he would like to tackle as President, stated:

Step 1, if I get up there, we're going to clean that up. You say how can I get Congress to do that? I have millions of people at my shoulder - shoulder to shoulder with me, and we will see it done at warp speed. Because it's wrong. It's just - we've turned the country upside down. (Perot, 1992, p. A23)

In both cases, Perot offered nothing specific about how he would fix the problems. Clearly, Perot relied on his can-do reputation. Perot thought that solutions to all the problems facing the country were there. All that was required was someone, someone like Ross Perot, to implement the plan. Time after time, in his rhetoric, Perot refers to these elusive "plans." Perot sounds this theme in the first presidential debate. Responding to a question on Medicare, Perot answered, "Again, we've got plans lying all over the place in Washington - nobody ever implements them" (Perot, 1992, p. A17). The second presidential debate produced a representative example. Discussing proposals to reduce crime, Perot offered "plans" as his solution, stating, "On any program, and this includes crime, you'll find we have all kinds of great plans lying around that never get enacted into law and implemented" (Perot, 1992, p. A12). The presence of the alleged plans was never verified nor was there any proof that Congress would be willing to enact any of them into law. Writer Molly Ivins discussing Perot's infomercials summarized his problem in October of 1992:

His [Perot's] first political advertisements ("And the engine needs A Major Overhaul") were actually wonderful exercises in what's wrong and how we might fix it. But suddenly how we might fix it has disappeared from the Perot ads entirely and instead we get these paid paeans of praise for Perot that would make Napoleon blush. (p. A21)

Two observations are important for this analysis. First, the appearance of the supposed plans that never had specific names or qualities merely fed the perception that Perot lacked any specific proposals to solve the problems facing the country. Second, the invocation of the alleged plans that lacked specificity or explanation placed the spotlight of audience scrutiny squarely on Perot and Perot's ethos. Without specific proposals, the audience was left to scrutinize only Perot. In the first debate, Perot demonstrated the connection, implicitly, between the alleged plans and his reputation. Responding to a question on rebuilding the job base, Perot said:

Please understand, there are great plans lying all over Washington nobody ever executes. It's like having a blueprint for a house you never built, and don't have anywhere to sleep. Now, the challenge is to take these things and do something with them. (Perot, 1992, p. A15)

Later, in the first debate, after complaining that there were "all kinds of great plans lying around" (Perot, 1992, p. A12), Perot concluded his statement by intoning,

"Now I'm back to square one if you want to stop talking about it and do it, then I'll be glad to go up there and we'll get it done" (Perot, 1992, p. A17). By not advancing specific proposals and relying on imaginary plans lying around Washington, Perot was relying on his can-do reputation as an answer to the hard questions posed on what he would do as President. Ultimately, his reputation, not his plans (or any others lying around Washington), became the reason to vote for him. Thus, Perot relying on his reputation (credibility) in turn damaged his credibility by not offering specific proposals for solving the nation's problems.

Aristotle notes in Book I of The Rhetoric that ethos is achieved by "what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak" (McKeon, 1941, p. 1329). Rosenthal (1966) advances a similar argument maintaining that ethos is a product of a speaker's emotional (pathos) and logical strategies (logos) rather than an equal partner in persuasion. Consequently, a speaker achieves credibility by what he/she says rather than who they are. Thus, Perot needed to offer specific proposals (logos) in order to sustain his reputation (ethos) not vice-versa. In fact, Roelofs argues that prophetic leaders do not engage in specific lines of argument. He notes that "the prophetic leader is not one to stand before his people to parse an argument, to analyze both sides of an issue, to solicit the people's views on resolving an open question. He is not there to debate or to negotiate" (1992, pp. 6-7).

Perot combined two essential features, his can-do reputation with his quasi-jeremiadic appeal. What results is a call for action, with Perot as commander, and no plan of attack. Roelofs (1992) argues that presidential leadership can be divided into two basic areas. One area, what Roelofs calls the legitimating role, concerns the President, "in his role as spokesman of the nation defined in Hebraic, Biblical terms" (p. 16). This role "can be seen as deeply involved in the primary, legitimating side of the political process," however, "more difficult questions are raised by trying to determine the relationship between this legitimating role...and the other roles that law, tradition, and scholarship assign to the presidency" (p. 17). In other words, a president must be able to fulfill both roles. He must be able to fulfill the legitimating function as national storyteller and, then, move to his functional role as president: the role of policy, action, and Chief Executive.

Although Perot was not yet president, clearly his rhetoric fulfills the first role of national story teller. Perot's message gives meaning to our past and our direction (in broad terms) toward the future. At the same time, Perot failed to move from the legitimating role that Roelofs describes to the functional role necessary for action. In order to be effective, a president (or in this case, a presidential candidate) must fulfill both functions. "Legitimacy is empty of significance," Roelofs concludes, "if it cannot be translated with ease into capacity for action" (1992, p. 17).

The contradictions, Roelofs argues, between legitimation and action can be most easily observed in the problem of language. He notes: "The prophetic tongue," he notes, "that the American President speaks in his legitimating role is powerful, emotional, deeply evocative;" however, "compelling as it may be, the tongue of Biblical prophecy is narrow," and to move from prophecy to action is "virtually impossible" (1992, p. 19). Given the American political system, that is exactly what has to be done. Roelofs explains:

Yet this [movement from legitimation to action], given the general character of the American political system, is what Presidents are compelled to try in order to translate their national legitimating efforts into practical courses of political action....Again, when Presidents engage the bureaucracy in the formulation and implementation of public policy, a specific language is required, a language of principle and generality, of rationality and comprehensiveness. Where in this language is there room for transcendent heroes, for personality, intimacy, and the particularity of mythic existentialist history. (1992, p. 19)

This is precisely the problem Perot encountered in his bid for the presidency. Although Roelofs is discussing presidential functions, it would appear that these roles also extend to the presidential campaign. Clearly, Perot excelled at the legitimation function using the language of prophecy. However, when pressed to

move into the realm of action, Perot stumbled and faltered. The assumption Perot made is that the people did not need specific lines of argument, they would simply trust Perot and his reputation to get the job done. In summary, Perot's failure can be traced, in part, to his utilization of the political jeremiad and its connection to the speaker, Ross Perot.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

In this chapter, I have argued that Perot possessed virtually all of the characteristics associated with prophets. Perot's "plain talk" coupled with his prophetic characteristics led the audience to assign prophetic authority to Perot, however temporary it may have been in the long run. I have also argued that Perot's message, his political jeremiad, appeared to resonate with the audience given the perceived crisis of 1992. Finally, I have argued that Perot used the television medium as no other candidate had done before to place his message before the people. My argument is not that Perot was a prophet. Rather, my argument is that Perot functioned as a prophet in the 1992 campaign.

Society's reaction to Perot, enemies and followers alike, provides more evidence for the thesis that Perot *functioned* as a prophet during the 1992 presidential campaign. Ultimately, society's reaction to the prophet is the central ingredient in any prophetic formula. John Sawyer (1987) notes that modern prophets, absent some protection, would most likely suffer ridicule at the hands of

society:

We might begin with the question, what would happen to such eccentrics in our own day? Some of them at any rate would undoubtedly be certified as insane. Others would be politely ignored. Others would be mercilessly laughed at. The only ones to survive long enough to make positive contributions to our society would be those protected by an institution (like the Church) or influential friends. (p. 17)

Could Perot have survived the 1992 campaign without his excessive wealth? Would he have received enough support to carry his message without the help of "influential friends?" Clearly, Perot's enormous wealth and relative isolation allowed him to preach his message without interference. Not subject to the whims of campaign support, Perot could say whatever he wanted to say without fear of retribution. Additionally, does Perot's treatment at the hands of Republicans and the media provide more evidence that Perot truly functioned as a prophet? Do the labels "kook" and "crazy man" feed the argument that Perot was indeed a prophet? Blank argues that one method of dealing with prophets is to "isolate and seal them off, as an organism does a harmful invader" (1969, p. 61). Is that what happened to Perot? Are these characterizations of Perot an attempt to "seal off" a harmful invader or are they accurate representations of a run-of-the-mill paranoid Texas billionaire seeking the presidency for his personal gain?

Thomas Overholt, in his book Channels of Prophecy, argues that "prophecy came to an end when prophets lost their base of support within society. As Wilson has put it, 'There can be no socially isolated intermediaries'" (1989, p.157). Ross Perot, despite his loss of prophetic ethos and his failure to engage the functional role of presidential politics never lost the faith of those who had lost faith in the system. Some may argue that those who voted for Perot were merely using him as a protest vehicle. I find that conclusion difficult to accept. Certainly some of the electorate voted for Perot out of frustration but Perot's capture of 20% of the popular vote would seem to argue against the electorate simply protesting the system and its choices. In fact, Perot never lost his base of social support. In a perceived crisis situation, despite his failures and his faults, Perot still appeared, to those who believed, to be the prophet to lead America into the next century, into the promised land.

## *CHAPTER FIVE: ROSS PEROT, PROPHECY,*

### *THE AMERICAN DREAM AND BEYOND*

Ross Perot's assumption of the prophetic role appears to validate the importance of prophecy to modern culture. The success of Perot's 1992 presidential campaign is testimony to the power of the prophetic role in modern American presidential politics. Additionally, Perot employment of the political jeremiad validates its existence as a viable genre and provides additional support for Johannesen's musing that the jeremiad, although in modified form, "survives on the contemporary secular scene" (1985, p. 171). Perot's combination of the two and his use of the television medium to reach a wide audience provides an explanation for how Perot's rhetoric functioned in the 1992 campaign. However, Perot's campaign was ultimately doomed, in part, by his damaged prophetic ethos and also by the inherent limitations of the jeremiadic form as a presidential campaign strategy.

As noted earlier, there are a large number of factors to consider in assessing the 1992 candidacy of Ross Perot. In addition to the mechanical effects of the two-party system noted by Duverger's law, Perot also faced the psychological effect of being a third-party candidate (see Abramson, et. al., 1995). Although Perot's prophetic role and his utilization of the political jeremiad clearly played a part in both Perot's success and failure, it is impossible to gauge the impact of either in the eventual outcome of the election. In short, Perot's persona and rhetoric, although important, if not critical, components in explaining the election of 1992, cannot exclusively account for his

record showing of 20% for a third-party candidate.

While the previous analysis provides an explanation for how Ross Perot's rhetoric functioned in the 1992 campaign, this chapter seeks to move beyond the context of the 1992 campaign and answer the question, where do we go from here? In order to answer that question, this chapter first analyzes the role of the prophet and prophecy in presidential political campaigns. Second, the role of the jeremiad is examined to see what, if any, contributions can be made to jeremiadic theory based on the results of this study. Third, the dynamics of the transition from sacred to secular will be examined to see what role it plays in contemporary political discourse. Finally, some suggestions for areas of future research are offered.

### ***THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPHECY AND PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS***

One area that deserves further study is the relationship between prophecy and political campaigns. Perot successfully generated prophetic ethos through his enactment of the American Dream and his enormous wealth. However, based on the results of this study, prophecy alone appears insufficient to win a presidential campaign. As noted throughout this study, the role of the prophet is a communication role. A prophet is a messenger from a divine source. The analysis in chapter four argues that Perot's adoption of the prophetic role ultimately failed. The purpose of this section is to explore whether that conclusion is limited to the results of 1992. In other words, was Perot's failure due to execution or design? Was Perot just poor at playing the role or is prophecy an inappropriate campaign strategy? To examine the question of execution,

we may pose two "what ifs." What if Perot had entered the presidential race and stayed the course? Second, what if Perot had not damaged his reputation with wild accusations that bordered on the paranoid?

As noted in chapter four, Perot's prophetic ethos suffered a death knell because Perot withdrew from the race in July and then reentered the race in October. This leads us to the first "what if" concerning Perot. What if Perot had not dropped out of the race? What if Perot had met the expectations of a true prophet? Would it have made a difference in the final outcome of the election? Does it explain Perot's showing in the election or was Perot's candidacy doomed by other factors?

Despite his withdrawal and subsequent reentry into the campaign, Perot still managed to pull roughly 20 percent of the popular vote. It is impossible to gauge the effect if Perot had not withdrawn from the campaign. First, there is no way to know how Perot's support would have changed, if at all, by his continuous presence in the campaign. One interpretation is that for a large number of those who initially supported Perot, his withdrawal made all the difference. In other words, if Perot had stayed the course then he probably would have received a greater percentage of the popular vote and perhaps some electoral votes. Catherine Criss, writing during Perot's musing in September of 1992 on whether or not he should reenter the campaign, commented that "many voters who were once infatuated with Perot [were now] openly contemptuous of his possible candidacy" (The Houston Chronicle, September 30, p. 14A). Craig Sullivan, spokesman for Governor Clinton's Texas campaign, noted in September of 1992 that "'it's difficult for people who once supported Mr. Perot to feel much warm

sentiment' toward him now" (Horvit, 1992, p. A13). As one former Perot backer explained, "By his dropping out, I lost faith in him." If Perot "would have stayed in, we [other Perot backers] would've all voted for him." (Criss, 1992, p. 14A).

However, analyses of election data dispute that interpretation. Alvarez and Nagler (1995) argue that the deciding issue in the election was the economy. They claim that the angry-voter hypothesis is inadequate to account for Perot's showing in 1992 as Perot "did not grab the votes of people most dissatisfied with economic performance or desiring change in Washington" (p. 739). Additionally, they assert that "the issue that worked for him [Perot] was the deficit" (p. 739) and attribute his success to "what has been long known about American elections: money buys votes, and money even buys votes in presidential elections amidst the din and storm of the campaign" (p. 739). Similarly, Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde (1995) argue that the "plurality-vote-win system" produced mechanical effects in which Perot accumulated many votes nationwide but produced very few electoral units (p. 363). In other words, the American electoral system worked against Perot as a third-party candidate. In short, other factors were far more important to the eventual election outcome than Perot's withdrawal and subsequent reentry.

However, their findings do not dispute the impact of Perot in the campaign. In fact, their conclusions have two important implications for this study. First, their observation that money buys votes supports the analysis of this study that money and wealth occupy center stage in American life. Second, their conclusion that the deficit was an issue that worked for Perot substantiates the power of Perot's linkage of the

debt/deficit with the extinction of the American dream.

In summary, as a prophet, Perot was expected to chart a particular course of action. Due to Perot's wealth and his enactment of the American Dream, the American electorate perceived him as having prophetic authority. Once Perot stepped into the role of prophet, certain expectations were incumbent upon him. Lindblom argues in Prophecy in Ancient Israel that a prophet is "compelled by the divine power." The prophet loses "the freedom of the ordinary man" and is "forced to follow the orders of the deity" (1962, p.2). Assuming the prophet's role concomitantly assumes a full-time devotion to the mission. Because Perot experienced his "call" from the people, once he accepted the role of prophet, he, in effect, abdicated his ability to choose. He was expected to play the part until the final curtain.

This expectation was clearly evident for two reasons. First, Perot had to be invited to run for president. He was not the seeker, he was the sought. Once Perot experienced and answered the call, he was expected to completely fulfill his role as prophet. Second, because Perot's rhetorical message was validated by the will of the people, the army of volunteers who worked for Perot placed additional pressures upon Perot to stay in the race. Many of Perot's volunteers quit their jobs and committed themselves full time to his election. For the volunteers, electing Perot would have been the secular equivalent of anointing him as King. The volunteers invested their time, money, energy, and hopes in Perot and his quest for the presidency. This fact helps to explain the depth and breadth of the fallout from Perot's withdrawal. Perot himself was cognizant of the pressure. In his withdrawal speech, Perot began by noting that

"Several million volunteers in all 50 states have done a brilliant job in re-establishing a government that comes from the people" (Perot, 1992, p. A16). Throughout the resignation speech, Perot complimented the volunteers, explained that "they have changed politics in this country" and commented that "the founding fathers would be very proud of you [the volunteers]" (1992, p. A16).

Because his campaign was staffed by volunteers, and because Perot relied on the will of the people to justify his presidential run, Perot was attempting to soften the blow of his withdrawal by highlighting the successes of the cause and focussing on their positive accomplishments. He concluded his withdrawal speech by stating that "both political parties are now squarely focused on the issues that concern the American people" and that "being associated with the volunteers across this country in the last few months has been one of the great experiences of my life" (Perot, 1992, p. A16). As Lindblom concludes, "Few things are so characteristic of prophets...as the feeling of being under a superhuman and supernatural constraint" (1962, p. 2). In other words, once Perot accepted the role of prophet, he was obligated to meet the expectations of a true prophet. When he did not play out the role, Perot felt obligated to explain to his true believers why he abandoned the role.

The second "what if" concerns Perot's paranoia. What if Perot had not damaged his own credibility with wild accusations he could not prove? The effect of this particular issue is difficult to gauge since it was not isolated. First, Perot had a history of unsubstantiated accusations and paranoid suspicions. Consequently, Perot's accusations in the heat of the campaign merely served to reinforce the perception of

"Inspector Perot." Second, the electorate's perception of Perot, in terms of this issue, was intimately bound up in his withdrawal from the race. Perot's explanation, provided much later in the campaign, that he withdrew because of Republican "dirty tricks" only served to tie the two together. As such, it is difficult to ascertain if the absence of the "dirty tricks" issue would have significantly affected Perot's support. Clearly, the melodrama contributed to the perception that Perot was temperamentally unsuited for the office of presidency. However, the effect of the issue was to merely become another nail in Perot's electoral coffin.

Thus, we are left to ponder "What ifs". What if there was a candidate who had lived the American Dream, thus generating prophetic authority? What if that candidate did not carry Perot's paranoia laced history coupled with unsubstantiated charges? What if that candidate ran for president and did not withdraw halfway through the campaign? What if that candidate's rhetoric resonated with the American electorate at a time of perceived crisis? In other words, what if a prophet appeared who succeeded where Perot failed? We have now come full circle to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Was it Perot's strategy or his execution? Perhaps the easiest way to answer this question is to place it in the context of the 1996 presidential election.

Once again the conditions appear ripe for the appearance of a prophet. There is still cynicism among the electorate over "politics as usual." Amy Kaslow, writing in The Christian Science Monitor, in October of 1995 argues that the "anxiety factor, which pushed a third party to the surface and contributed heavily to the defeat of

George Bush in 1992, is even stronger today" (1995, p. 3). A Los Angeles Times 1995 poll reported in the November 5th Kansas City Star found that "Americans are disaffected from Congress and uncertain about President Clinton" (The Kansas City Star, 1995, p. A12). Their dissatisfaction results in an America that is "deeply discouraged about the country's direction" (The Kansas City Star, 1995, p. A12). Poll after poll indicates that, like 1992, the electorate is dissatisfied and uncomfortable with both parties in 1996. Although Perot has not announced he will run, he has formed a third party, United We Stand, that intends to be on all state ballots in 1996. Whether or not Perot will run in 1996 is not as important as the question of whether Perot can effectively run in 1996. At this point, Perot would have a difficult time attaining prophetic ethos in 1996. As noted earlier, Perot's on-off-on campaign in 1992 severely damaged his prophetic ethos. A 1996 Perot presidential campaign would be hampered by the electorate's memory of 1992. Once a potential prophet has been exposed as a fraud, attaining prophetic ethos again is virtually impossible.

Conversely, it is possible to possess the characteristics of a prophet and yet not answer the call. A perfect example is Colin Powell. If we apply the characteristics of a prophet to General Powell, he appears to possess most of those characteristics. In Powell's case, we are presented, in many respects with a close to carbon copy of Perot's 1992 presidential bid. The difference is that Powell carries none of Perot's political baggage. As James Kelly of Time magazine noted, "Colin Powell embodies the American Dream; in this age of the anti-politician, Colin Powell has good reason to hope he could be the American Dream candidate" (1995, p. 59). If my assessment in

chapter four was correct concerning the power of the American Dream as a political appeal, particularly if the Dream is both enacted and invoked as an appeal, then Powell would seem an ideal candidate for the presidency. Powell parallels Perot's enactment of the Dream and, in some ways, moves beyond it

First, Powell made his name in the military. In the tradition of Washington and Eisenhower, Powell is a beloved military leader. Traditionally, Americans have worshipped war heroes, and as historian Fred Greenstein of Princeton University notes "Americans tend to turn to Generals when they get fed up with the political process" (Perry, 1995, p.A22). Americans identify with, and more importantly trust, those who are victorious on the military battlefield.

Second, as an African-American, Powell generates ethos because he has "lived the American Dream." Despite his race, he rose from his modest beginnings in the Bronx to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Anthony Lewis argues, in The New York Times, that "the patriotism of the American story, the rise from obscure poverty to fame and riches" is the "most obvious element" of Powell's appeal (1995, p. A15). In a Perot parallel, Powell employs the dream rhetorically. John Walcott, staff writer for U.S. News and World Report, explains that Powell, speaking to groups across the nation, has perfected what amounts to a stump speech. "The heart of the speech," notes Walcott, "is the story of his climb from the streets of the South Bronx to the top of the American military" (1995, p. 22).

The combination of those two factors have created enormous popularity for General Powell. According to a August 1995 U.S. News and World Report poll found

Powell's favorable ratings have "climbed from 62 percent to 71 percent of registered voters while his unfavorable ratings have fallen from 11 percent to five percent" (Walcott, p.18). As late as September of 1995, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC news poll, General Powell tied President Clinton in a three way race for the presidency with 30% of the vote. Mortimer Zuckerman, writing in U.S. News and World Report, summarized Powell's appeal when he noted "Few political leaders are trusted, but if anything defines Colin Powell it is the word 'trust'." (1995, p. 64). Clearly General Powell has established himself with the credentials of a prophet but, as of this writing, he has chosen to ignore the call. In short, just because someone possesses prophetic characteristics does not guarantee that he or she will become a prophet. Perhaps General Powell will decide to answer the call in 2000. Two other caveats must be offered. First, it is possible that Colin Powell may find another forum for his prophetic message. As noted earlier, the function of a prophet is not necessarily tied to elected office as prophets usually operate outside of the system. Secondly, it may be possible that other prophets exist on the horizon. He or she has yet to be identified.

### ***THE JEREMIAD: PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC?***

Although prophets and prophecy appear to be important elements in presidential campaigns, it is virtually impossible to separate the speakers from the messages. The conclusions reached in chapter four suggest that, in Perot's case, the rhetorical form adopted for his prophecy, the political jeremiad (a version of the contemporary secular jeremiad), did not function properly in the context of a presidential campaign. Perot's jeremiad excelled at performing what Roelofs calls the "prophetic, legitimating role" of

presidential communication (1992, p. 17). However, it failed at the second role: the "exercising roles" required for presidents and presidential candidates (Roelofs, 1992, p. 17). Consequently, whether Perot, or any prophet for that matter, can be successful (i.e. get elected) in seeking the office of the presidency will depend not only upon the acquisition of prophetic ethos but also the sufficient development of the prophetic message. The results of this study argue that a presidential aspirant must not only exhibit the characteristics of a prophet, he must also select an appropriate rhetorical strategy which includes both the ritualistic portions of a prophetic message and the specific solutions required in a presidential campaign.

The conclusions drawn in chapter four suggests the jeremiad is unsuited for use in the context of a presidential campaign. Although the jeremiad adequately fulfills the legitimation function of presidential politics, the fundamental nature of the jeremiad prevents it from being an appropriate vehicle for presidential campaign politics. As noted in chapter four, Perot's consistent inability to articulate specific proposals for the ills he identified became an Achilles heel of his campaign. In one respect, Perot was a victim of his own success. Because Perot enacted the American Dream, exhibited prophetic authority, and because his jeremiadic message of lament resonated with the American voters, Perot needed to provide solutions to the ills he defined. Perot excelled in explaining the problems that confronted the country. He touched a raw nerve by linking the debt with the possible extinction of the American Dream. However, once he isolated the problem, the next obvious question became, what do we do about this problem? Without those solutions, Perot became just another social critic,

cognizant of our problems as a society but without a program or proposal to, in his words, "get under the hood and fix what was wrong."

Beyond Perot's immediate application, there are implications that can be drawn for the jeremiadic genre. Perot's use of the jeremiad and its ultimate failure may suggest that the genre has been redefined. Although Perot's application of the jeremiad confirmed most of the research on jeremiads, it failed to account for the source of the identified sin. Puritan jeremiads typically placed the fault upon the people themselves. However, Perot, for strategic reasons, explicitly placed the blame squarely on someone other than the people: the government. Perot's shift in blame is inconsistent with a traditional jeremiad. Johannesen (1985) hints at this inconsistency in his article on Jenkin Lloyd Jones. Discussing the American Puritan jeremiad, Johannesen asks the rhetorical question, "Where should the blame for sins and calamities be placed? (p. 158). He recognizes that while Puritan jeremiads "frequently put the blame for their sins and calamities on the colonial community itself, Elliot (1975, p. 189) notes that in Cotton Mather's sermons for the period 1686-1695 'the people of New England had never been the cause of the colony's hardships. The forces of evil outside the garden had jealously attempted to wreck God's plan.'" (Johannesen, p. 158)

Johannesen notes this shift in blame is evident in Jenkin Lloyd Jones speech in the 1960s. He explains that "with the Puritan jeremiad the blame for sins and calamities typically was placed on the colonists themselves" while Jenkin Lloyd Jones distributed "the blame for America's current troubles among external alien forces..., internal alien forces..., failures of character in American citizens themselves..., and

irresponsibility of his immediate audience" (1985, p. 166).

Perhaps Perot's jeremiad continued the process. Conceivably, in Perot, we have a new version of the jeremiad: the political jeremiad. The political jeremiad possesses virtually all of the characteristics of a traditional jeremiad. The political jeremiad invokes the civil religion of the American dream while depicting Americans as the "chosen" people. It elevates the founding fathers and sacred documents to mythic status. Finally, the political jeremiad intertwines lamentation of present ills with optimism about the future. However, the political jeremiad, for strategic reasons, places the blame for the sin, the problems being lamented, upon a convenient scapegoat. In other words, one way the sin is ameliorated by the scolding prophet is that the prophet scolds someone else. The audience (in this case, the American people) are not the ones responsible for the problems at hand (the sin). Rather, a scapegoat (in this case, the federal government) is responsible for the problems besieging the society.

If a prophet is outside the system, a voice in the wilderness, such a shift is unnecessary. The prophet can blame the people because he or she is merely a messenger. However, once a prophet is inside the system or wishes to be (as in the case of Perot), two things happen. First, the prophet moves from messenger to savior. This allows the solutions to attach themselves to the prophet who then becomes a savior. In Perot's case, he moved from prophet to savior once he declared his candidacy. He was no longer just a prophet, or a social critic, outside the system. He was now part of the system. It is interesting to note that most of the popular literature on Perot referred to him as a savior rather than a prophet (see Wills, 1995; Holmes,

1992). Second, once inside the system, a change occurs in the loci of the blame. The prophet now scapegoats someone other than those responsible. Why? Because those responsible for the sin (in this case, the people) are also responsible for the system. Perot could not blame the people if he expected the people to vote for him in the election.

The results of this study suggests that although prophecy may be an integral part of the presidency and presidential campaigns, it cannot carry the banner alone. In short, a prophet cannot be elected President solely because he or she is a prophet. Although a prophet may fulfill the legitimation function of the presidency in the context of a presidential campaign, he or she may not be able to fulfill the second, exercising function. The rhetorical forms invoked by the prophet (e.g. the jeremiad) and the nature of prophecy itself appear to hamstring the candidate's ability to advance specific policies to solve the identified problems. This is not to say that a President or a presidential candidate cannot serve prophetic functions. Clearly, past, current, and future presidents and presidential candidates fulfill prophetic leadership functions. The nature of prophecy as a communication activity and the nature of the presidency as a rhetorical office both suggest that a prophet would be at home in the White House. However, a presidential candidate must be more. This analysis suggests that prior to possessing the office of the presidency, a prophet must be more than a prophet: he or she must also be a politician.

While a prophetic message and prophetic ethos help to gain support in presidential campaigning, in essence, prophecy best serves the ritualistic ceremonial

functions of the presidency: functions that are not present or, perhaps, minimized in a presidential campaign. Further, when the electorate goes to the voting booth, they are uncomfortable voting for a candidate who is perceived as incapable of moving beyond ritual to substance. American voters approve of a presidential candidate who will "tell it like it is." However, before they turn the reins of power over to that candidate, the candidate must spell out what he or she will do to solve those problems. A prophet may be a popular and admired social critic but, to be President, a prophet must be more. To be successful, he or she must spell out what is wrong with society, but also explain the nature of our sin, and explain, in detail, how he or she will lead the nation back to the righteous path. Beyond the limitations of the jeremiad as presidential rhetoric, the transition from the sacred to the secular may also serve an important role in contemporary political discourse.

### ***THE TRANSITION FROM THE SACRED TO THE SECULAR***

Many of the questions raised in this study may find their answers in the relationship between the sacred and the secular. Because the power of Perot's appeals lay, in large part, in their sacred origins, we must look at how those appeals bridge the sacred to the secular. In order to examine the relationship between the sacred and the secular, we must examine what prophetic elements and expectations appear in both the sacred and the secular. Most of the original sacred elements of prophecy are carried over into the secular realm. A secular prophet retains his status as a public messenger from a divine authority. The prophet understands that his prophetic discourse is of a divine nature and the message itself appears to be a traditional message. As explained

in chapter three, all of these elements appear as part of Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign.

Additionally, certain expectations appear with a secular prophet. First, like a sacred prophet, a secular prophet is expected to receive a "divine" call. As explained earlier, being the sought instead of the seeker contributed to Perot's prophetic ethos. Second, a secular prophet is expected to be speaking the secular equivalent of God's word. Because Perot was a prophet, he was supposed to be able to cut through "politics as usual" and articulate what the American people wanted in terms of their government. Perot's plain talk contributed to the perception that he spoke for "the people" rather than entrenched, established Washington interests. Third, additional evidence of the prophet's validity appears to be a component of the secular prophet's ethos. The audience needs something beyond the prophet's words that he is, in fact, speaking with divine authority. In Perot's case, the evidence of his divine origin could be found in his accumulation of enormous wealth and in his enactment of the American Dream. Thus it would appear that the secular elements and expectations present in the campaign of 1992 closely parallel what is present in sacred prophecy.

Perhaps the ultimate reason that American voters were reticent to hand over the reins of power to Ross Perot is that prophetic appeals are beyond the comprehension of a secular electorate. In a secular age, the predominant cultural matrix makes prophecy virtually impossible. Levi Olan, writing in his book, Prophetic Faith and The Secular Age, notes that prophetic messages are not subject to strict laws of logic. He argues that biblical prophets are to be "believed not because they are reasonable and make

good sense, although most of them can pass that test." Their messages are valid not because they are logical, but as Olan argues, "because the prophet received them directly from God" (1982, p. 27). In short, we believe them because we believe they speak for God. He concludes that modern prophets are possible but our current "cultural milieu, however, renders it almost impossible, because it would have to pass through a rigorous examination by logic, mathematics, and the natural and behavioral sciences. The declaration 'Thus said the Lord' by anyone today is beyond comprehension" (1982, p. 27).

### *THOUGHTS ON FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH*

Clearly the role of prophecy and the jeremiadic genre deserve more study. Perot's enactment of the prophetic role and his use of the jeremiad in 1992 is adequate evidence of their power. The function of jeremiads in presidential campaigns should be more closely scrutinized. Several questions can be posed for such an analysis. Is the jeremiad always (or usually) a poor strategy for use in political campaigns? Is its use limited to national political races, specifically, presidential campaigns? Does the nature of the jeremiad prevent a successful campaign if it is employed? What is the relationship between prophecy and jeremiads? Does a prophet automatically precede a jeremiad? If not, why not? Do political prophets necessarily use the jeremiad? Can they use other types of prophetic discourse?

Further, the relationship between prophecy and political campaigns should be clarified. Is prophecy an inappropriate campaign strategy? If so, how is the relationship between prophetic leadership functions reconciled with presidential campaigns?

Although some tentative conclusions were reached in this study, they are, of necessity, limited in their application. The relationship should be examined beyond the scope of presidential politics to determine if prophecy is an important element in other political races. Although some of these questions have been addressed in the course of this study, the answers are far from clear. The hope is that this study has provided a springboard for future, fruitful research.

Another area that should be examined is the relationship between the media and political campaigns. One set of questions that could be asked involve the media's relationship with third party presidential campaigns? How will Perot's treatment at the hands of the media, both establishment and alternative, affect future presidential candidates and campaigns? What is the relationship between the media and agenda-setting in presidential campaigns. Does the media influence a candidate's decision to take stands on specific issues? What did the media learn from Perot? Can a candidate influence the media or create new avenues within the media?

### *SUMMARY*

This study has argued that Ross Perot functioned as a prophet in the 1992 presidential campaign. Perot's use of the jeremiad intertwining lamentation with optimism served to strike a chord with the American electorate. Although he was able to mine the discontent present in the voters, Perot was unable to advance specific proposals to solve the ills he identified. Finally, Perot's withdrawal and subsequent reentry damaged his prophetic ethos beyond repair. Even if Perot was truly a prophet, his proclamation would have failed the test. Perot's inability to move from the language

of prophecy to the language of action parallels the audience's inability to dispense with logic and move toward faith. In essence, those who wanted to believe did. Those who did not want to accept Perot as prophet, or savior, dismissed him and his message. Finally, those who were not sure were forced to ultimately vote for Bush or Clinton or none of the above because of Perot's inability to convince those voters that he was indeed a prophetic figure and could solve the problems he had isolated. In short, the proclamation was not enough. They needed something more. As Olan concludes, "the claim of the biblical prophet to divine revelation as the source of his message eludes a modern mind conditioned by an empirical-rational mode of thought" (1982, p. 39).

Olan's argument is premised on the idea that a prophet without specific proposals will not operate effectively within the current system. He is not arguing that we do not have prophets. He is merely stating that in the present system, our expectations requires a prophet who has a plan. In short, a prophet may be effective initially but eventually he must also be a politician. So too it would seem with the prophet from Plano, Henry Ross Perot.

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