Life on the Campaign Trail: The Political Anthropology of Local Politics

E.J Ford

University of South Florida

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Life on the Campaign Trail:

The Political Anthropology of Local Politics

by

E.J. Ford

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Kevin Yelvington, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D.
Frederick Steier, Ph.D.
Harry Vanden, Ph.D.
Beverly Ward, Ph.D.

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Dedication: This document is dedicated to Mary Mulhern, who suffered my questions and my advice with patience and grace.
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ABSTRACT

This document is an ethnographic account of one researcher’s experience during an election season spent with one candidate. The document considers the history of political anthropology as a subfield of anthropology, the deployment of ideology and hegemony as theoretical concepts, and includes a brief history of Tampa and Hillsborough County politics. The document attempts to make connections between the practical necessities of campaigning, with reference to the processual approach of examining micro-political process, and theoretical issues related to the subject of political anthropology, notably the concepts of ideology, hegemony, and the subject of elites in human social organization.
1 Introduction

The house was large and sat on a tree-lined street in one of the older neighborhoods in the city. Just a few blocks away, there is a major thoroughfare lined with shuttered businesses but this street is quiet and obviously well-maintained. A few decades of urban homesteading have revitalized the old neighborhood and many of the architecturally idiomatic Tampa-style bungalows have been restored or expanded by their current owners at no small expense. Inside one of these houses, on the night I attended, a member of county government was announcing her candidacy for United States Congress.

Outside, on the porch, campaign staffers enrolled attendees on the campaign’s mailing list. There was also the ubiquitous basket filled with contribution envelopes. Months later, I will learn that many campaign fundraisers begin with a staff-member (“staffer”) placing a few “starter” envelopes in the empty contribution basket at the start of the evening to give the impression of early success. However, tonight, the basket filled steadily, from just a few (actual) donations when I arrived to dozens by the end of the evening. I place my own small campaign contribution into the basket (anonymous in its envelope) and enter the party.

Inside, the house party was starting in the awkward way that any party of comparative strangers begins. People spoke to their friends and acquaintances and ambled from the drinks to the food and back to the corner they had staked out for the
evening. A long-time Democratic Party activist whom I had known for many years invited me to this gathering. I had told her about my research interests and she suggested that I come to this event and make a sales pitch to the candidates who would attend.

There were other acquaintances scattered around the room: friends of the host and hostess, political activists, local bureaucrats, some office-holders, a few office-seekers, one or two retired politicians. I was fortunate because I know the homeowners who were the party’s hosts. While the party guests arrived, one of the homeowners took me on a tour of the house. It was far larger than my own middle-class home and very nicely appointed. As we concluded our tour, the increase in noise downstairs informed us that the guest of honor had arrived.

We slipped downstairs as the candidate mounted the stairs in the opposite direction. The staircase acted as an impromptu oratory platform. County Commissioner Kathy Castor was seeking election to the United States House of Representatives. She was (and is) small in stature and she needed some kind of physical elevation or platform (a real platform not a political one!) in order to address the whole crowd. She gave an informal speech that almost seemed more like a conversation with the room that she was making public. It was not rousing oratory but it was a pleasing speech and that night it was a very sympathetic crowd. Of all the candidates on this year’s election slate, Castor was the most probable winner for her political party and the room knew it. Months later, in the general election, she ran almost unopposed and handily took the seat. Her speech concluded and she began working the room.

Her small stature, the contours of the house, and the crowd of well-wishers made it hard for me to get close to her. I circled the room, and the friend who invited me
introduced me to her campaign manager. I made my pitch embarrassed even as the words come out of my mouth:

“Hi, I’m a PhD student from the University of South Florida. I’m interested in helping a candidate win their election by aiding them in framing the debate. I believe I can help sculpt the language used by the campaign in a way that will allow you to stick close to your core principles and also make inroads on your opponent’s political base. I was inspired to do this during the 2004 political election. The nation saw John Kerry flailing around, trying to find a voice in a way that would never have been a problem for Bill Clinton during the 1992 or 1996 elections. Remember when John Kerry was ‘caught on tape’ telling union members that Bush was a crook? Remember how his campaign backed away from that statement and how it was used as a weapon by Karl Rove and the Bush campaign? I believe that an aggressive, well-disciplined counter-punch would have not only neutralized criticism but also might have helped win the election. If I can be of assistance to your campaign…” At which point I passed him my beige and red business card.

He showed a little interest, politely listening to what I had to offer undistracted by the roomful of potential donors circulating around the room. Later, I would discover that this level of enthusiasm is a very typical response on the part of both politicians and campaign managers. This level of politeness has more to do with not alienating a potential voter than it does with actually acting on the request or recommendation of the speaker. Whatever the campaign manager’s feelings about my request or suggestion, I would have received a similar level of courtesy.
As I continued to circle the room, I met two other Democratic candidates. One was a Democratic Party activist with a long history of Bay Area political organizing. She was running for the School Board. That office is considered a non-partisan race, meaning that candidates don’t announce their party affiliation and that there are restrictions placed on the amount of assistance or involvement that a party can undertake. However, her long-standing affiliation with the Hillsborough County Democratic Executive Committee effectively meant that she was, within the limits of the law, running as a party candidate. She wore a dark business suit and a professionally-made metal name tag.

The other candidate I met was a graphic designer and small business owner, named Mary Mulhern, who has been involved with Bay Area politics in earnest since the frustrating result of the 2000 Presidential election, which ended in ambiguous defeat for the Democratic candidate and galvanized middle and upper-class party activists (about which more later). She wore a dark business suit and a professionally designed but homemade (she designed and printed it herself) paper nametag. She was running for the County Commission seat being vacated by the Congressional candidate who is the guest of honor. As I met each of these women, I give my sales pitch, embarrassed even as the words come out of my mouth:

“Hi, I’m a PhD student from the University of South Florida. I’m interested in helping a candidate win their election by aiding them in framing the debate. I believe I can help sculpt the language used by the campaign in a way that will allow you to stick close to your core principles and also make inroads on your opponent’s political base. I was inspired to do this during the 2004 political election. The nation saw John Kerry flailing around, trying to find a voice in a way that would never have been a problem for
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When the politicians of my acquaintance make a public appearance, they are generally really good at making you feel like what you are saying is important and interesting, and I did after speaking to these two candidates. However, I had no idea what they thought of me and I was getting pretty embarrassed.

Suddenly, the crowd parted and I was standing in front of the Congressional candidate. I shook her hand and re-introduced myself. She and I had met while I was doing a research project a few years prior to this meeting. Her face registered first non-recognition, then recognition, then dismay as I started my sales pitch (“As you may remember, Commissioner, I am a PhD student at the University of South Florida…”).

I left the party shortly thereafter with no hope of being invited to help any of the campaigns. All I had to show is a little time reconnecting with old acquaintances at a cocktail party I had paid to attend. And I don’t like cocktail parties.

Days later, I received phone calls from the County Commission candidate and the School Board candidate, in that order. Having given my word to help the County Commission candidate, I was unable to assist with the School Board race. In my ignorance, I assumed that because it’s a non-partisan race that it will be a less contentious race than the County Commission race. This School Board race would become one of
the most contentious and interesting races on the ballot. I did not hear back from the Congressional Candidate until the election cycle was almost over and that was an incidental discussion with her campaign while canvassing for Mary Mulhern, the County Commission Candidate.
1.1 Situating the Work

Beginning in early 2006, I was involved in the candidacy of a woman named Mary Mulhern who was interested in holding local political office. She was not a professional politician or bureaucrat. She had been involved in local politics as a volunteer and activist, but had never sought office previously. My candidate was a small business owner and a museum administrator prior to her campaign. Over the course of the following year, I was with her as she knocked on doors, spoke at candidate forums, wrote campaign publications, sent out emails, assembled her website, and made countless hundreds of fundraising phone calls. She worked very hard. She lost. And then, she won.

My involvement in the campaign was a result of some reading I had done regarding the 2004 Presidential Election. Several popular political books had been written about how clueless the Democrats were in reaching out to voters and “framing the debate.” The most notable book in this area is George Lakoff’s Don’t Think of an Elephant, (George Lakoff, Howard Dean, and Don Hazen 2004). Interestingly, a 2007 appearance (March 16, 2007) by former Congressman Tom DeLay on the Rush Limbaugh radio program came to a similar conclusion – that the recent problem with the Republican Party was that they were not doing a good job of framing their message and that correcting this problem would be key to reasserting the GOP’s fortunes in the political arena. The implication of Lakoff’s writing (and DeLay’s comments) seemed to be that, if you worked hard to rephrase something, you could bring voters around to a
viewpoint that differed fundamentally from the putative status quo. I felt that this was a way that I could make use of some research I had done previously regarding the intellectual pedigree of some conservative positions. In a way, my research on conservatives was a sort of scouting report for my more liberal candidate.

Further, as a result of some initial reading I had done on the subject, I believed that the political economic literature, notably the work of Antonio Gramsci and some of his anthropological successors, supported this contention, especially his material related to ideologically contesting hegemony, although I was later to discover that this was, in some ways, a naïve interpretation of his work. It was only after reading Kate Crehan’s (2002) interpretation of Gramsci that I came to realize how truly significant Gramsci’s work is in interpreting local politics, and how many interpretations miss the fundamental issues.

As I will discuss in some detail during the conclusion of this document, I found that there were underlying factors that made it hard to affect the outcome simply by word-smithing the message. There were institutional forces that acted as a block on disseminating our message. There was also a reluctance on the part of my candidate to challenge some Republican shibboleths, for reasons I will discuss, reasons that are related directly to a Gramscian interpretation of power as well as the concept of regime politics (c.f. Kerstein 2001:10, about which, more later). Further, there were very serious limitations on the degree to which you can excite interest and attention in local politics, which I will discuss. In the end, some things changed, and she won in her second bid for elective office, a scant four months after losing in her first bid.
In many ways, I was embedded in this campaign, not in the sense of a reporter in a
campaign, but as an operative in its interest, fully immersed in the campaign’s
objectives, rather than a passive observer. My role in the campaign was manifold. As a
volunteer with professional skills, I was asked to do more than waving signs on street
corners or knocking on doors and distributing campaign literature. I did those things, too,
but I wore many hats during the race. I maintained the website, did opposition research,
answered endorsement questionnaires, and tried to help write campaign press releases.
My opposition research primarily consisted of attempting to profile the two candidates
that opposed Mary Mulhern in her County Commission and City Council races: I read
newspaper clippings; I tried to review the public records that reflected the business of the
legislative body on which both her opponents served; and, I collected campaign literature
disseminated by the opponents. Unlike some opposition research, I did no muckraking.
I didn’t look for criminal records and, what information I discovered of a questionable
nature was not used, by mutual agreement with the candidate with whom I was working.
If a newspaper reported it, or it was available in public records, we tried to make use of it.
If it was an rumor (unconfirmed or otherwise), we did not.

The candidate has told me on several occasions that part of my value to the
campaign had to do with my physical presence, a “big guy” following the physically
diminutive candidate. She maintains that it gave her campaign credibility among the
burly union workers that she wooed for an endorsement. I did my best to attend as many
campaign-related functions as I could and, when I could not attend, I was often writing or
researching for the campaign.
Elections are conflicts. There are political forces that are brought into play and the election is nominally resolved, in the United States, in the polling place, at least in terms of the most basic interpretation of the political process. In fact, candidates marshal political power in the streets and living rooms of the districts in which they are running. Long before the election, candidates or, in the case of state-wide or national candidates, their representatives, are knocking on doors and attending public meetings in order to introduce themselves to the electorate. And, of course, they are fundraising.

Raising money is probably the most significant institutional constraint on winning elections. You can have a very creative campaign and still lose to a candidate who is well-funded and therefore more capable of mass-communicating a message to the electorate. While there have been some very successful campaigns run in Florida with little funding, money is the one resource that is never unwelcome in political campaigns. Two notable Florida exceptions were the 1990 and 1994 campaigns of Lawton Chiles, a former United States Senator who was under-funded compared to his Republican opponents in both races (Florida Department of State Division of Elections). His legendary come-from-behind victory in 1994 was one of the few checks on the meteoric rise of President George H. W. Bush’s son J. E. B. Bush during the 1990’s. Chiles ran a grass-roots campaign capitalizing on his reputation as “Walkin’ Lawton”: his campaign strategy was literally walking from one end of the state to another, a strategy that had previously won him his Senatorial seat, beginning with his first term in the Senate in 1970. However, for the vast majority of campaigns, money fuels the fight, rather than gimmicks.
Money pays for radio time, television time, newspaper advertisements, bumper stickers, yard signs, campaign workers, mailers, direct mail, palm cards, and public events. Money can also be spent on less demonstrably useful things like campaign consultants, professional office space, expensive new office equipment, or Italian suits. One candidate for Hillsborough County Commission ran into a minor scandal during the period of this research when he spent campaign funds on a new wardrobe last fall.

As we learned, campaign workers can substitute sweat equity for some aspects of the political campaign process. For example, instead of renting a hall, we organized a gathering at a public park. Instead of hiring campaign consultants during the County race, we read books and articles about political campaigns and we called on the talents of more experienced campaign operatives who had volunteered to help free of charge. My candidate has been an activist and volunteer in other campaigns and she had many friends in the local political community who were willing to help. Access to contacts, whether they are party members, interest-group activists, or newspaper reporters, can be a huge asset to a candidate. Party members can wave signs, interest-group activists can add your candidate’s name to their list of endorsements, reporters can give “earned coverage” (about which, more later). Without giving a dime, these contacts can help to alter the outcome of the race.

But candidates raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for even local-level offices. In fact, Mulhern was opposed by the leading fund-raisers in both of her races. In the first race, for County Commission, she was outspent ten-to-one by an opponent who broke county records for fundraising for this level of political office. In the second race, for City Council, she was outspent by about four to one. In both cases, my candidate’s
opposition took advantage of campaign finance regulations to maximize fundraising. Both opponents accepted bundled contributions, multiple contributions given by organizations through the legal fiction of corporate identity.

In Florida, as in many other locations, candidates can raise money from actual human individuals and corporations, legally considered “individuals.” Campaign donations are limited to $500.00 per person or corporate entity. However, by using multiple corporations that are owned by contributors, multiple donations can be given (“bundled”) to the same candidate. There was no way that we could match those accumulated resources because our campaign did not draw the support of the business-owning classes to the same degree that our opponents did.

In both of her elections, Mulhern’s opponents were experienced candidates, who had each run more than one campaign for elective office: Rose Ferlita, her opponent in the County Commission race, was a veteran of two terms on the City Council, winning her second race for office by a large margin; Shawn Harrison also had served two terms on City Council, running in a geographic (as opposed to at-large) district comprised of relatively affluent neighborhoods. Both Ferlita and Harrison held office at the outset of their respective campaigns, although they did resign from the City Council during the race, in compliance with state law. Each was connected to the powerful Florida Republican Party. Each had numerous well-heeled friends, capable of making donations and raising money. Further, like my candidate, Mary Mulhern, each of her opponents had a bulging address book, with connections to local, state, and even national-level political activists and office-holders who could be deployed in their interest. An address book, in some ways, can be a more powerful campaign tool than a check book.
This combination of institutional factors acted as an amplification system of the message that each candidate espoused. In the case of the more affluent campaigns, their message could be broadcast on billboards, on television and radio, and so forth. In the absence of resources and connections to people and institutions, it is very difficult for a candidate to get a message out to the electorate.

That is, unless the press coverage is earned. A candidate garners earned coverage by creating or drawing attention to situations that bear examination by the press. For example, my candidate spent some of her campaign’s resources on life-sized two-dimensional cutouts (made of a plastic material called “foam-core”; actually a kind of corrugated plastic typical for political signage) that could be carried to public places and waved at pedestrians and passing motorists. This was sufficient to obtain a few newspaper articles as well as a television news piece. For another example, my candidate garnered earned coverage by drawing attention to the lackluster record of her opponent in the City Council race with a series of clever ads that took advantage of the popularity of the TV show Heroes (see Chapter Five for a discussion of issues related to campaign materiel as well as the necessary resource accumulation for running a political campaign).

Another factor that was an impediment to fighting this battle in the realm of ideology was the reluctance of the candidate to engage in certain kinds of discourse. While I argued that my candidate should assume an aggressive, accusatory stance, pointing out the shortcomings of her County Commission opponent and drawing attention to the sources of her bundled campaign contributions, this was not to be the case. She argued that rather than simply being something posted on a web-log (“blog”) or said in the privacy of a living room, she would be expected to challenge the opponent
and, more importantly, subject her observations to public scrutiny. Mulhern’s opponent, Rose Ferlita, has a reputation as a hard-nosed political campaigner; that may have been a factor in my candidate’s reluctance. I will argue later in this work that this reluctance is, in a way, one of the forces for the maintenance of hegemonic power, in the Gramscian sense (see chapters Four and Five).

During the City Council campaign, she cast off some of her reluctance and challenged her opponent through that series of ads I mentioned a moment ago. In part, this was out of a sense of frustration with the outcome of the County Commission race. However, this was also a consequence of the more assertive techniques of her paid campaign consultant, a partisan activist who wanted to polarize the race and draw attention to the differences between the two candidates. The City Council opponent, Shawn Harrison, simplified the moral dilemma by having a mediocre record and a lack of name-recognition. Newspaper accounts of his career were almost non-existent. As a minority candidate (a conservative on a majority-liberal City Council), Harrison’s work was primarily to act as a genial voice of dissent during his tenure on the council. While he had won reelection to the City Council, his victory was not especially impressive. Further, term limits were forcing Harrison to run for office in the entire city, as opposed to his geographic district. Previously, Harrison had sought office in a geographic district comprising relatively affluent New Tampa. After two terms representing that district, he was seeking election city-wide, which requires a strategy capable of garnering support in a much more diverse population. In other words, there was vulnerability and my candidate attacked it. This change in campaign strategy is discussed in chapter V as well as the concluding chapter.
There is another issue, however, that complicated the campaign: Boredom. Unlike state-level and national politics, which have several hot button issues (immigration; abortion; war; gay and lesbian rights; energy policy; arms control; and, so forth), local-level politics have very few exciting or appealing issues that galvanize popular involvement and brand candidates. Although there are distinctions between Democrats and Republicans in principle, outsider critics like Ralph Nader have derided the two-party system as being a contest of “gonadal politics” (Silverstine 2000). Hot button issues like gay marriage and abortion, according to Nader, are used as cudgels by both parties to excite participation in the electoral process without actually changing the systemic forces at work. Many candidates want to create a “brand” – an image or impression designed to convey a shorthand understanding of the candidate to potential voters. A candidate wants to have the most appealing public identity and wants his or her opponent to be saddled with the least appealing. Some argue that branding was the marketing mechanism by which the Republicans managed to defeat John Kerry during the 2004 election; certainly the accusations of the Swiftboat Veterans for Truth and the nickname “Flip-flopper” did not help Kerry’s elective office aspirations. Hot button issues, like abortion or any of the others, facilitate branding. As we shall see, this degree of political polarization is not absent from local-level races but it is, perhaps, more muted in terms of the topics used. For example, a County Commissioner or City Councilperson cannot pass legislation that trumps national or state law on a subject like same-sex marriage. While that topic might be off-limits for a campaign, other, related subjects could be used instead. One local candidate, Ronda Storms, worked hard to prevent displays of gay and lesbian literature at public libraries; she also worked hard to make
displays of nudity, even in gentlemen’s clubs, more regulated. She was widely respected in her conservative district for such positions.

However, zoning issues constitute a huge amount of the work done by Tampa City Council or the Hillsborough County Commission. Other policy work, related to the services (law enforcement, parks, social services, and, at the county level, some school funding) are only marginally more interesting. True, individuals hoping to redress a grievance or protect their rights (property or otherwise) can become activists with an agenda associated with local politics but the vast majority of residents do not choose to vote in elections dedicated to local candidates (see chapter V for an exploration of why it is so hard to become interested in local-level politics). During the recent City Council races, which included a mayoral election, only 16% of the eligible voters in the City actually turned out to vote. The candidates’ respective get-out-the-vote efforts, ultimately, were what determined the results, rather than exciting general interest in the election.

Local politics may be boring but they do actually represent a very important part of the larger political process and, I believe, they are the key to accessing institutional political power if you are part of a group that is not a traditional conservator of social institutions. The various Christian conservative movements have understood this and have successfully politicized even the lowest-level political office (well illustrated in Skaggs and Van Tyler 2004 documentary *With God on Our Side: George W. Bush and the Rise of the Religious Right in America*). Local political offices constitute a farm league for state and national political office, providing the necessary seasoning and resume enhancement for long-term political candidacy. Perhaps more importantly (and
this is, by no means a certainty – political power at the local level can have a marginal apparent effect on other levels of political involvement), local elected officials enact policy decisions that have real impacts on the residents of the communities where they operate. There is power and patronage to be doled out. Local office is far more attainable for an individual candidate. All you have to do is mount a get out the vote campaign that can ensure 50% plus one vote. For a city race, even in a comparatively large city, like Tampa, Florida, where this research was conducted, you can achieve victory with just a few thousand votes. Further, local office is far more accessible to the citizen voter. Office holders ignore supplicants and petitioners at their peril, especially if they have long-term political aspirations. While each individual political problem may be somewhat mysterious (see my discussion about City Council decision making in the Conclusions Section), a sufficiently noisy group of activists can render almost any decision a liability for a candidate if they are inclined to do it. Plus, since office holders have comparatively small territories to represent, they generally know them pretty well and can relate to the plight of the residents.

Throughout this work, I hope to illuminate some of the issues associated with political power and the efforts to attain it undertaken by one candidate. Her story is an interesting one and you may find that there are some lessons to be learned from her struggles.
Rain pelted down as the candidate forum began. It was not quite cool outside, and candidates and citizens alike sweated as the meeting convened. The building was a church and the meeting took place in the main hall of worship. The church’s pastor acted as host.

On the agenda for the evening were four School Board Candidates and three candidates for County Commission, including Mary Mulhern and two of the four Republican candidates – Gary Santti and Don Kruse. Neither of the two GOP front-runners (Rose Ferlita and Brad Swanson) attended. Additionally, a third-party candidate from the Constitution Party (C. Burt Linthicum) was in attendance as a candidate for the State Legislature.

Since the hot issue in the western part of the county was school redistricting, the school board candidates received the majority of the time. Community activists, outraged by the well-intentioned reassignment of their children to new schools farther from home, were very interested in the outcome of the School Board races. The format of the event involved questions from a moderator (a local television news personality) and questions from the floor. Unlike the now-typical model of televised debates, where candidates are encouraged to speak briefly and not every candidate gets to answer every question, each candidate had time to answer each question in this time-consuming format.

After hours of School Board candidate responses, the moderator called a break before the County Commission candidates took the floor. Many of the attendees left. I quickly conferred with my candidate, reminding her to stay on message, to keep her comments brief, to the point, and upbeat, accommodating the fatigue of the audience.
Often, candidates who are unsure what to say will talk endlessly, covering their vague comments with a camouflage of pointless verbiage. This evening was no exception. Most of the School Board candidates were especially guilty of this, in part because they could hear the anger in the room – residents were frustrated by the difficulties they were having with the sitting School Board and wanted immediate results from the people they sent to replace the incumbents – and the candidates were reluctant to take a position that could evoke umbrage. Mulhern readily agreed with my advice, having come to similar conclusions, and the second session began.

The attendees that remained were not expecting much. After several rounds of questions from the moderator, primarily covering issues related to property taxes and budget priorities, citizens asked questions of the candidates. Many of those still in attendance were members of a local home-owners’ group. The neighborhood, in the extreme western, coastal portion of the county, is riddled with canals and marshy lowlands. Although the canals can be visually charming, decades of municipal and county indifference have resulted in waterways that are silted and choked with vegetation. This community has been seeking governmental assistance in dredging these canals, an act that would increase property values of waterfront homes as well as facilitating boat access from the canal neighborhoods to the wider expanse of Tampa Bay.

One resident of the area stood up and said: “You [County Commission candidates] all talk to us like we’re your friend and promise to help us but will any of you promise to come here and attend our [home-owners group] meetings?”
During the meeting, the microphone had been passed in a round, from one candidate to another, with the order of the candidates altering with each question, to give each a chance to speak first or last. The rotation had created some minor confusion but, in answering this question, the candidates each took their turn cordially, standing up to speak, passing the microphone, and then returning to their seats.

The first to speak was Don Kruse, a car dealer who had purchased a classic fire truck to use as a combination bill-board and campaign icon. His campaign slogan called for voters to “Put out the fire” in local government. His answer was polite and friendly (as all of his answers had been) but did not answer the question directly. He expressed dismay at the needs of the neighborhood and promised to do his best to solve some of their problems. The audience murmured, neither angry nor pleased.

The second to answer was Gary Santti, a retired engineer from the extreme southeastern corner of the district. He was from an area that was as far from the site of this campaign meeting as you could be without leaving the district. He responded to the question by pleading geographic inconvenience and, instead, suggested that the residents of the present area would always be welcome in his office at the county center, several miles from the site. His answer was the least satisfying one given all night and was met with stony silence.

When it was Mulhern’s turn to answer, she took the microphone, stepped forward, and simply said: “Yes, I will attend your meetings.” She then turned and sat back down. The answer was met with the strongest applause of the night for any candidate on any question. The audience was overjoyed that, for the first time that night, a candidate had given them a clear, un-nuanced, straight-forward, unequivocal answer. In my seat at the
side of the room, I saw the crowd sit up and take notice of Mulhern in a different way than they had previously.
2.1 Introduction

This research project was an effort to explain how a political candidate can make a successful run for office. More particularly, how a candidate that lacked many of the features of a conventionally successful campaign (explicit connections to powerful interest groups; massive campaign fund war-chest) could challenge the conventional wisdom and upset a candidate who was more closely tied to the traditional signifiers of power.

To go about answering these questions, I made some attempt to explore the literature of other anthropologists who have examined issues of political power. I have explored the buffet of ideas and selected some relevant morsels that may prove to be helpful. In this section, I will explore issues related to the formation of the subdiscipline of cultural anthropology known as political anthropology. My treatment of this subject will be cursory. Entire books have, obviously, been written on the subject and I will not replicate that work in this document. This section is primarily intended as a way of contextualizing my work within the larger tradition of anthropology but it should by no means be confused with an exhaustive treatment of the subject. It could be argued that my research could have been conducted without explicit reference to my anthropological antecedents. However, not only are there ideas from those earlier eras that still bear some scrutiny but it must be understood that I am, ultimately, pragmatic in my work. If concepts of earlier eras of research could assist in my resolution of the applied project I
have undertaken here, then I will, of course, employ them. If not, then those earlier eras bear some discussion regarding why those ideas lack durability today.

Further, I will explore two concepts that come to political anthropology from the area of political economy, *hegemony* and a related concept *ideology*. These ideas, though contested, are powerful concepts that form the basis of my interpretation of the political situation under discussion. Clear understanding of each of these subjects is not as ubiquitous as one might like and I, following Crehan (2002), contend that anthropological interpretations of hegemony and ideology are based on an erroneous interpretation of the work of Gramsci. My objective in this area is to eliminate some of the confusion regarding these terms if, for no other reason, than to create a pair of operational definitions for the purposes of the project.
2.2 Political Anthropology

Political anthropology, as an area of interest within anthropology, has a history almost as long as the discipline as a whole. Although most current scholarship (notably Vincent 1990) sets the beginning of the era of formal political anthropology at around 1940, anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan had included references to political organization in some of the seminal works in the field (Lewellen 2003:3-4). Many of the theoretical and methodological issues associated with anthropology as a whole are mirrored in the work of political anthropologists (loosely called!) who struggled to come to grips with the political organization of human beings the world over. I should note that although some dates in the history of political anthropology are disarmingly specific (like the commonly acknowledged date of 1940 as the beginning of the formal subdiscipline of political anthropology; c.f., Vincent 1990), most of the periods of history under discussion are not distinct periods. In 1940, Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard published their work, *African Political Systems*. Even the 1940 date is somewhat misleading because the theoretical elements in play at that point, primarily structural-functionalism, had appeared on the scene several years previously. In other words, the phases described below are approximate and not mutually exclusive.

As I describe the outline of political anthropology, I will try to associate the concepts that are on offer by the subdiscipline to my current research. In some cases, even quite old ideas are still very much relevant to the questions of political social organization in 21st Century Florida.
Political anthropology moves through several significant phases, as described by Kurtz (2001), Lewellen (2003), Vincent (1990), and, Vincent (2002). Vincent, in the introduction to her massive *Political Anthropology* (1990), refers in detail to numerous periods but begins by dividing the world of political anthropology into two phases: the anthropology of politics, which refers to the early period when there was no coherent subdiscipline; and, political anthropology, which begins at around the time of the Second World War and constitutes the formation and elaboration of a more or less formal subdiscipline in the area of political matters.

However, to detail the more specific features of the field I will discuss the basic phases in the history of the anthropology of politics/political anthropology, which include (after Lewellen 2003): 1) Nineteenth-Century Evolutionists; 2) a Reaction period, including American historical particularists and a European shift toward sociological/Durkheimian conceptions of socio-cultural organization; 3) British Functionalism, an extension or outgrowth of earlier work in the Durkheimian theoretical paradigm; 4) a Transitional period, approximately beginning the political anthropology era, associated with a shift toward a political anthropology associated with describing process rather than static interpretations of political institutions; 5) Neo-Evolutionism, a return to the idea that cultural processes change in an (admittedly non-unilinear) evolutionary way; 6) Conflict and Criticism, a period characterized by assaults on the status quo, both as a theoretical objective and as a more general challenge to the accepted world order and including movements toward political economy, feminism, and similarly politically charged interpretations of human behavior; 7) Postmodernism; and, finally, 8)
Globalization. As I explore, briefly, each of these eight historical eras, I will attempt to
draw connections between those bodies of work and the current project.

It is my contention that political anthropology consists of the outpouring of this
collective work. Its objective is to study political institutions and processes and their
interaction with other cultural processes. Anthropologists study these things in a variety
of ways, including fieldwork in societies around the world and comparative ethnological
work performed by researchers at a remove from direct contact with subject populations.
Although both Lewellen and Vincent characterize “politics” as essentially indefinable
(Lewellen 2003:231; Vincent, 2002:1), all efforts at political anthropology have a
common aspect, however, and that is that they are an effort to study “[t]he processes [and
means] involved in determining and implementing public goals and… the differential
achievement and use of power by the members of the group concerned with those goals”
(Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966:7, as cited in Lewellen 2003:231; bracketed insertions
mine). In other words, the objective of political anthropology has been to describe these
processes and means of manipulating power. This interpretation is supported by Kurtz
(2001), Lewellen (2003), Vincent (2002), and Spencer (2001). This definition is broad,
but necessary because of the plethora of political activity around the world. The diversity
of political institutions, means for organizing political power, and even the political
construction of the discipline of anthropology itself have all come under the purview of
political anthropology (Spenser 2001:11628). As we shall see, the field has never had a
uniform conception of what is or is not political beyond these generalities.
2.2.1 Nineteenth-Century Evolutionists

In anthropology’s early days as an organized discipline, anthropologists were eclectic in their interests and, in some cases, prolific in their writing. One figure that looms large in early conceptions of political anthropology, especially in American anthropology, is Lewis Henry Morgan. Other theorists and researchers could also be categorized as evolutionists, like Marx’s colleague Frederick Engels (who drew on Morgan’s research) and Henry Maine (who suggested that human society evolved away from religion and kinship as means for organizing society and toward secular, territory-based means) or James Frazer (“an evolutionist magpie” according to Gellner 1995:12), but Morgan’s evolutionary model, which presupposes that the human species has moved through stages of development, from savagery, through barbarism, and into civilization is emblematic of evolutionary thought from this period (Lewellen 2003:3-4). According to Morgan’s model, not all humans had made it through every stage – there were, in fact, representatives of each of the putatively earlier stages still in existence at the time of Morgan’s work. Such evolutionary thought has been refuted by many anthropologists, from numerous perspectives. Morgan’s stages of development are paralleled by his contention that political power has moved through similar evolutionary processes, from anarchy (with power differentiation based around gender), through “gens (lineages), phratries (clans), tribes, confederacies, nations, and states” (Kurtz 2001:140). Morgan’s work was cited by Marxists (for example, Kurtz, ibid. and Gellner1995:118, 119), which some argue is a reason why his work fell out of favor in the polarized political world of the early to mid 20th century. Others (like Lewellen 2003) suggest that the 20th century’s rejection of Morgan (at least until the Neo Evolutionary period, below) was a repudiation
of the racist implications of the work, that placed Euro-American civilization at the pinnacle of species development and relegated other cultures to less advanced rungs of the evolutionary ladder. Harris (1968:171-173) contends that unilinear evolution was never a consideration of serious proponents of evolutionary thought. As Lewellen and Kurtz contend, the weaknesses of Morgan’s ideas relate more closely to the fact that the work of evolutionary thinkers fell out of favor at the beginning of the 20th century rather than a blanket invalidation of his ideas.

To political anthropology, Morgan contributes the concept of kinship as a form of political organization as well as the concept of political organization as an evolutionary process. Kinship is a form of political organization and the dichotomy only diminishes the significance of political organization at that level.

From the standpoint of my own latter day research, the idea that political power can be vested in aspects of society that are not conventionally seen as political actors cannot be more relevant. Although this work relates to political entities in their most formal conception (elective public office is politics with a capital P), informal institutions, like kinship but also including networks of friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, all played a role in this discussion of politics.

Another thought that bears discussion in consideration of early evolutionary thought is the idea that the process of evolution results in a single inevitable byproduct of history. As I hope I have shown, this idea was not necessarily part of the thinking of early evolutionists but it is an interpretation of this period that must be considered. Needless to say, I do not believe that there is a single inevitable outcome. However, it must be understood that if evolution is a process of change, then the rational move is not
to reject evolutionary thought but identify what causes change and what, in particular actually changes.

In any case, criticisms of Morgan and the other evolutionists spawned an oceanic rift between American and European anthropology, a rift which we shall now examine.

2.2.2 Reaction
For different reasons, during the period that Vincent (1990:78-151) describes as the Uneasy Years, 1898-1918, anthropologists rejected evolutionist thought and found other ideas. In the United States, the Boasian tradition known by some as historical particularism suggested that the evolutionists were torturing facts to fit a racist agenda based on the assumption of unilineal evolution. In Europe, French and English anthropologists moved away from evolutionary thought and toward a discussion of Durkheim’s sociological functionalism. And, more generally, the Europeans moved away from any idea suggested by Americans. Although some of the ideas of the evolutionary period persisted, most were challenged by the respective new guards, resulting in a new landscape that was reluctant to explore issues related to political organization in the same way.

This is not to say that political issues were not considered. American and European anthropologists were eclectic in the extreme and collected information on a wide array of topics (consider Boas, who examined Eskimo art, Kwakiutl economics, and immigrant craniums with equal diligence and skill (Lewellen 2003:1)). It would have been more difficult, in some ways, for the fieldworkers and ethnologists of the time to stop collecting and analyzing data on politics. But what occurred during this period was a reconsideration of the implications of politics and a reformation of the sorts of studies
that involved political issues. Whereas evolutionists looked at political issues as a validation of their belief that there were hierarchies of political organization, with kin groups acting as the smallest/most primitive/least hierarchical level of political organization, historical particularists looked at politics as a feature of a society that was to be examined in an almost atheoretical manner, with data collected for the purpose of salvaging the cultures of what were assumed to be vanishing groups of people.

On the other hand, British functionalists (as we will soon see) focused on the collection of social facts in their effort to explain the function of various institutions within a given society (Lewellen 2003:5). They emphasized kinship as a principal form of sociopolitical organization, primarily because the work they conducted was in colonial outposts that, they argued, did not have existent, indigenous political structures in their societies. Perhaps because of the damage done to such indigenous political structures as a consequence of the colonial process (as discussed in Wolf 1982), they were less visible to the researchers of the time. Perhaps the remnants of racism or imperialism precluded serious examination of political issues within the context of the native populations. Regardless of the cause, British functionalists declined to discuss politics in a rigorous, formal way until Evans Pritchard in 1940.

Kurtz’s interpretation of the American rejection of evolutionist thought is that the Boasian, cultural relativist challenge to the scientific paradigm would ultimately culminate in postmodernism as a theoretical orientation decades later (Kurtz 2001:192). Regardless of the aftermath of the historical particularist response, the motivation was clear: to rid anthropology of some of the racist and methodological inaccuracies of the past. Evolutionists were concerned with comparing cultures, generally for the purpose of
arranging the societies hierarchically. Boas insisted that it was improper to do so and suggested that each society should be seen from within its own context rather than compared to other societies (Lewellen 2003:5). Politics, as a feature of society, would therefore need to be seen within a societal context, in the same way that religious practice or body adornment was seen from a perspective of cultural relativism. Historical particularism’s great Boasian contribution to anthropology, cultural relativism, as a disciplinary quality, encourages us to examine the features of a culture within the context of that culture – to interpret or understand that culture from its own points of reference.

Lewellen suggests that one member of the generation reacting to the evolutionist era actually resolved some problems inherent in evolutionist thought and helped pave the way for subsequent neo-evolutionary ideas. That was Robert Lowie (Lewellen 2003:5-6, Kurtz 2001:170-171), who contended that the rise of state formations was based on two factors. First, Lowie suggested that social organization in all societies is based, to a certain extent, on territoriality, a concept which contradicts Morgan’s and Maine’s assertions to the contrary regarding kin-based societies. Second, Lowie contended that state formations are a logical outgrowth of the formation of institutional culture that cuts across kin groups, like age sets and religious groups. In other words, Lowie suggested that there was a transitional form between “primitive” groups and state formations. It is important to note that Lowie did not suggest that societies were moving in a unilinear fashion. Rather, Lowie believed that there were historical contingencies that led to the rise of any given state formation. He believed that current state formations could be made more understandable through recourse to comparison with contemporary “extant
primitive societies” (Sicker 1991:18), in some ways foreshadowing the emphasis placed on historical circumstance epitomized by Wolf (1982).

2.2.3 British Functionalism

British research during this period focused on the application of sociological thought, emanating from Durkheim. While Bronislaw Malinowski inspired a revolution in fieldwork during this period, it was structural-functionalists, like Radcliffe-Brown, who attempted to demonstrate that the institutions of a society, including the political ones, worked together to hold a society in equilibrium (Lewellen 2003:8). Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functionalism is strongly associated with the idea that societies are closed systems (Lewellen 2003:81), discrete bubbles that exist, in some sense, independent of outside influences. His work became the basis for researchers like Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans Pritchard, who collaborated on the landmark book *African Political Systems* (1940), which marks the beginning of the subdiscipline called political anthropology, according to Vincent (1990).

The basic assertions of structural functionalism are these: That the purpose of anthropological research is “To show how particular institutions serve to maintain the equilibrium of the whole society” (Lewellen 2003:86). The basic unit of analysis for research is “A society, tribe, social group, etc., usually treated as an ideal whole” (ibid.). One of the fundamental assumptions of the research is that societies are, essentially synchronic in nature and change is regarded as something which is outside the area of interest of researchers, who emphasized equilibrium (ibid.).

Structural-functionalists, like Evans-Pritchard, explain what he called “stateless societies” (c.f. Kurtz 2001:74), which he divided into nomadic hunter/gatherer societies
and societies involving the segmentary lineage. Segmentary lineages are networks of communities that operate in an autonomous fashion unless they are challenged from outside the immediate network by another lineage or other aggressor. As a conflict escalates in size, more segments of the lineage are called upon to participate in the general struggle. This concept is significant because it is an effort to identify the kinship apparatus as the focal point for socio-political organization, the idea that collaboration through real or imagined kin links can create large scale political operations even in the absence of formal political institutions.

Age sets and age grades are another identified structure that was researched by structural functionalists (Kurtz 2001:76-77). Age sets and grades act as a way to define the social status of a member of a society, moving a person through sets like “junior, warrior, and elder” (Kurtz 2001:76) and grades within those sets. The exploration of such issues by structural-functionalists contributed to a better understanding of societies that seem to lack conventional (i.e., European-style) state-based political organization.

Interestingly, features of the segmentary lineage, as a form of hierarchical interrelation of political interests, are not entirely unrelated to discussions of hegemonic formations. Power, consolidated in dominant coalitions, capable of activating every segment of the structure in times of crisis, is a key feature of political coalition. Individual segments may even regard themselves as enemies on some subjects while participating as allies in a political sense (as in the case of different conservative religious sects that argue bitterly over questions of theology but turn out as a block to support conservative candidates). See my discussion of hegemony, below.
2.2.4 The Transitional Period

The structural-functionalist paradigm did not appeal to all researchers. In fact, during the period beginning in the 1950’s, some researchers, like Leach (1954), began focusing on the instability of political systems, which defied the orderly models of political scientists and anthropologists. It was Gluckman (1956), an early proponent of structural-functionalism, who asserted that instability is more likely than static, stable equilibrium. Indeed, Gluckman, in his 1956 volume, “exhausted the potential of the [structural-functionalist] paradigm to provide new insight into the integrating mechanisms at work in human society when he demonstrated that even social conflicts, such as feuds and rebellions, resulted in social integration” (Kurtz 2001:101) and suggested instead that there should be a focus on conflict and process rather than the conservation of political stability. This shift would come to fruition in the processual paradigm, discussed below.

2.2.5 Neo-Evolutionism

While the processual model was beginning to emerge, another trend in political anthropological thought was reemerging. Evolutionary thought, rejected by Americans for being insufficiently based on fieldwork in the Boasian research tradition (and because it was Marxist) and rejected by Europeans for being insufficiently explanatory in a structural-functionalist sense (and because concepts of inevitable social change were regarded as potentially Marxist), began to make a comeback in the work of researchers like White (1943), Steward (1955), and Service (1975). These researchers began by rejecting the unilinear model of the early evolutionists, a move which Lewellen describes as fostering an unnecessary dichotomy with that earlier era (2003:10). Lewellen asserts
that earlier evolutionists were not necessarily unilineal in their outlook and so should not be considered at odds with the later group of theorists.

Neo-evolutionary thinkers attempted to explain the structure of political life in society as a function of the relationship between humans and their environment. White contended that energy, its management and production, caused evolutionary change (1943) in culture. Service (1975), in a formulation that created one of the most noteworthy political anthropology concepts, contended that the change from band, to tribe, to chiefdom, to state, was a byproduct of food production strategies. The evolutionary thinkers set out to describe political processes as a function of these causal factors and ended up with models that were strongly dependant on ideas related to technology and environment. As heavily deterministic conceptions of human social organization, they were also less able to discuss the role of agency or the place of change and alteration to societies without recourse to massive environmental forces. In the anti-Communist America of the 1940’s and 1950’s, this form of materialist evolutionary thought made it possible to discuss Marxist ideas about causal factors in human cultural adaptation without actually invoking the name of Marx. This is not to suggest that the inclusion of such ideas went unnoticed or without stigma during the period, as the expose written by D.H. Price and W.J. Peace illustrates (2003). Later adherents to the general principles of the neo-evolutionist paradigm, like the cultural materialists, restored Marx to the discourse.

Another thread in neo-evolutionary thought is the creation of typologies. Service’s model, for example, is notable for its use even by those who reject the evolutionary paradigm. Typologies, like these and those of the structural-functionalists,
have been criticized (by Leach 1961) as butterfly collecting. Typologies divide and categorize, but without consideration of the relationship of the categories created by typologies, the differences become little more than the details of an undifferentiated mass. Nevertheless, they constituted an attempt to recognize patterns of social organization and, as such, constitute a positive contribution to the field.

The neo-evolutionary emphasis on material conditions creating social and ideological arrangements is at the core of my political project, albeit one seen through the later lens of political economic refinements of the idea.

2.2.6 Processes

Both the evolutionary model and structural-functionalism share a common flaw, despite the fundamentally different orientation of the two schools of thought. With structural-functionalism, there is a disregard for change. With evolutionary thought, there is minimal concern with change – change is regarded as a necessary phase between two states of being, as for example, the shift between the chiefdom and state levels of political organization. However, the actual mechanism for such change or the causal factors in creating change are less a subject than in establishing sequences of comparative stability. For proponents of the processual model, both of these theories missed the basic point – that change is ongoing and continuous and that the process of change is more significant than the relatively brief periods of stability that occur between moments of flux.

The landmark work in this period is the volume by Swartz, Turner and Tuden (1966), which encapsulated much of the early work done in this area. However, it should
not be assumed that this book was the first, last, or only work on this subject. Gluckman, as we have discussed, was turning toward a processual analysis during the 1950’s.

What is the process approach? Lewellen begins by dividing the approach into two theoretical orientations: process theory and action theory (2003:84-94). Process theory begins with the goal of attempting to “define the processes involved in political competitions and in implementing public goals” (2003:86). It accomplishes this goal by examining the *political field* – “any area in which political interaction takes place” (2003:86). Researchers in this paradigm use a diachronic approach that focuses on the actual history of the area as well as or instead of ideal processes of change through time (2003:86).

The elements of political power that comprise the assets of an individual in the arena are considered, as are the implicit conflicts of a political field. Kurtz contends (2001:105) that conflict is the foremost contribution of processual political anthropology. The recognition of competition, the inevitability of change, and the disparities of power in political matters constituted a break with the structural-functionalist, who emphasized continuity and resistance to change in their work. Change, for the processualists, was understood as an essential part of political fields and political arenas.

By contrast, the action theory prefigures some theories of agency as it focuses on the actions of individuals. These individuals work within a *political arena*, “an area in which individual actors or small groups vie for political power” (Lewellen 2003:86). “Political arenas may be, or be comprised all or in part of, factions, patron-client relations, parties, elites, and other informal para-political groups” (2003:86). While action theory is, like process theory, diachronic, it focuses more closely on individual
actors within the political arena. The ways in which an individual actor behaves within the arena are competitive, marshalling forces based on individual power structures and deflecting the counterblows of other agent-led factions.

Both process theory and action theory (in this sense) have been criticized as being abstract and less useful in terms of concrete explanatory power. The emphasis on process and change laid the methodological framework for the next wave of researchers, who would apply the concepts of conflict and process to a more explicitly value-oriented set of research objectives.

2.2.7 Conflict and Criticism

After the processual paradigm shifted the focus of research from political institutions to political process, toward the actual instances of culture change and their actual mechanisms, it was natural, perhaps, to shift toward a more value-explicit conception of political anthropology. In other words, once one begins to understand that multiple outcomes can be evoked as a result of specific actions undertaken during the process, then value-judgments regarding the various outcomes are likely. Lewellen (2003:12-13) points to the rise of theoretical orientations as a response to a need for a more explicitly critical anthropology. Feminism and political economy appear during this era.

Feminist thought challenges accepted standards within anthropological thought generally and political anthropological thought in specific. For example, feminist scholars like Morgen (1989) attack the assumption that all societies everywhere have power differentials along gender lines. Instead, they suggest that gender, like race, ethnicity, and class, needs to be considered as an analytical category (Lewellen
2003:134). While no outright matriarchies exist, it is clear that women do have more power than traditional anthropological thought would lead one to believe. Lewellen (2003:138-141) cites several examples of research proving that women in different cultures occupy power roles that are not simply subordinate but possessed of significant influence even though they are nominally in what would have traditionally been called a male-dominated society. Another area in which feminist thought influenced political anthropology is in the definition of the status of women itself. Attempts to define this status and, by extension, the dominance relationship with men, have included: reviews of the distribution of resources between men and women and their roles in obtaining them (notably Dahlberg 1981); examinations of public/domestic life (for example, Hammond and Jablow 1976); explorations of nature versus culture (Ortner 1974); residence rules (Lewellen 2003: 146-147); and, attempts to explain the changing role of women in relation to the history of the species (Leacock 1981). In short, feminist thought has caused a serious reconsideration of previously given ideas about the relationship between men and women and has caused researchers to reconsider some of their first principles in describing human social life and political organization. One of feminism’s great contributions to political anthropological thought is the exploration of power and its relationship not just to gender but to other factors which situate power in a larger social context.

Another exploration of the concept of definitions of power comes from political economy which attempts to explain political relationships within a larger framework of economic and historical forces. Political economy traces its origins to a period prior to the earliest anthropological writings. Its first proponents were Adam Smith, David
Ricardo, and Karl Marx. Marx now dominates discussions of political economy but Marx’s involvement with political radicalism has been an impediment to the employment of Marxist ideas as theoretical models, due to the hostility they have engendered on the part of reactionaries (Price and Peace 2003). Kurtz (2001:121), for example, tells an anecdote regarding the degree to which the Marxist emphasis on production came to be undervalued in comparison to discussions of distribution networks. It was only later, with the work of Marxists gaining wider acceptance that Marxist conceptions of political economy began to resurge.

What then is political economy’s contribution to political anthropology? Kurtz identifies four interrelated areas. First, political economic thought emphasizes production as a more effective means for gauging power relationships than distribution (Kurtz 2001:123-125). Polanyi (as quoted in Dalton 1968) identifies distribution as the key to ascertaining power relationships, but also said that non-market distribution systems had little need for economic analysis (Kurtz 2001:122). By contrast, Fried (1967) argued that political power relationships were more or less direct outgrowths of relationship to the means of production. While he explained power relationships in terms of this relationship, Fried does not continue the line of reasoning to the Marxist conclusion that the people who control production are in a position to control power relationships and maintain their own grip on power. Wolf, for his part, contends that the centralizing effect of distribution networks is the basis of the formation of hierarchical relationships in societies (1982).

The second way in which political economy contributed to political anthropological thought was in a discussion of modes of production (Kurtz 2001:125-
Marx identified modes of production and inspired discussion and analysis within anthropology, most notably, for my purposes here, Wolf (1982), who said that a mode of production was “a specific historically occurring set of social retaliations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge” (1982:75) and its utility is “its capacity to underline the strategic relationships involved in the deployment of social labor by organized human pluralities” (1982:76). The implication of this idea is, as Kurtz (2001:126) points out, that these modes of production are controlled by “political leaders, agents, governments, or others, such as capitalists, who are intricately interconnected with structures of political power and authority.” For Lewellen, Wolf’s work represents the inclusion of world system theory in the discussion of political anthropology: “Wolf contended that all, or virtually all, cultures can be understood only in relation to the expansion of European capitalism over the last centuries” (Lewellen 2003:12).

The third way in which political economic thought impacts political anthropology is in the idea of cultural Marxism, which Kurtz describes as “an interpretive, cultural analysis that emphasized the role of ideology in shaping the relations of production of societies on the peripheries of the world capitalist system” (Kurtz 2001:119). One exemplar of this model of anthropological thought is, according to Kurtz, McDonald (for example, 1993 and 1999, cited in Kurtz 2001:127). McDonald’s work attempts to explore “political and cultural power, ideology, and conflict through the voices of leaders… and frames their politics in the context of powerful concepts” (like gouvernmentality “to account for practices and rhetoric of government leaders” (Kurtz 2001:128) and simulacra “as signs detached from reality to account for much for the
political discourse related to political economic processes” (Kurtz 2001:128)). Other immensely powerful come from older Marxist thinkers and have been revived by political economic theorists. This leads us to…

The fourth way relates to Kurtz’s own efforts to incorporate the work of Antonio Gramsci in political anthropology (Kurtz 2001:128-131). Kurtz has written extensively on this subject. Essentially, the question answered by this work is this: why do people work to produce a surplus beyond their own need and why would they sacrifice that surplus to some kind of ruling elite. Kurtz explains these two questions with recourse to his own concept of hegemonic culturation, which will be discussed in the section related to hegemony which follows this section. Power relationships are dependent, therefore, on their ability to control processes of culturation. I will treat Gramsci’s discussion of hegemony and ideology much more extensively in a moment.

As I have noted previously, this project is firmly rooted in the political economic tradition, especially with regard to Wolf and Crehan and their respective treatments of Gramsci. As I hope to demonstrate, my work involves identifying the degree to which individual political elites employ or resist the political economic forces within the political field/arena of Central Florida politics. Wolf’s assertions of the value of ideology in the creation and recreation of power relationships are entirely on point here. Crehan’s assertions related to the role of the intellectual and the production of hegemonic power, based on interpretations of Gramsci (2002:128-161) are also on point here. They will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Crehan, interpreting Gramsci, contends that those that perform an organizational role in society should be thought of as the “intellectuals” of that society (2002:132) and
that the role of such a group is to act as the junior officers and non-commissioned officers in the implementation of the rules of the larger political economic structure. As intellectuals, their responsibility is to create interpretations of power relationships, validating them where appropriate, critiquing and dismissing them where necessary. Political candidates would fit into this category, as would the campaign advisors who serve them. Politicians often capitalize on the symbols or trappings of anti-incumbency in their efforts to get elected. It is often seen to be a virtue to be someone who is not beholden to “special interests” whether those interests are corporate capitalism or some disempowered minority group whose power is conflated with hegemonic status by reactionary demagogues. For example, Frank (2004) reports numerous examples of politicians redefining the concept of class, intentionally confusing educational attainment and personal preference with the economic category in order to convey an appearance of populism without making actual overtures to improve the economic lot of the working class. In this instance, the manipulation of the class concept serves a higher purpose, which is to reduce or even eliminate serious discussion of class and the political economic structure within the arena of electoral politics. It is the job of the organic intellectual to act as the front-man (or woman) for that hegemonic conceit. It is not surprising that politicians in our system would be reluctant to challenge the status quo. First, because they have been educated in this system and, naturally, see it as normal and rational – they are willing consumers of the rationales of the existing system. Second, and perhaps more obviously, the political system as we have it in our culture is so heavily dependent on the resources of the wealthy, that a politician can scarcely run a serious
campaign without the support of at least some of the more affluent members of the community.

Sassoon suggests that this is an inherent irony of the increases of democracy in a political system (2000:32-33). In the process of expanding the power of the state to create bureaucracies, and the parallel increases in the political power of capital as it reorganizes along corporate (bureaucratic) lines, humans have created institutions that transcend easy control by individual people, especially those not possessed of a firm grip on the means of production. Rather, what is called for is a class of politicians who represent a different relationship to the division of labor (2000:33). This kind of relationship could be caused by the formation of new processes, previously unexploited resources, or a new form of training of the organic intellectuals so that they, themselves, initiate the process of change. Sassoon suggests that a vanguard of organic intellectuals, responding to the needs of their community but also providing a new understanding of the needs for the community, can create a situation of social change (2000:35).

We will discuss this political economic interpretation of political agency further in the subsequent sections on ideology and hegemony.

In summary, feminist and political economic thought both contribute newer understandings of power relationships and reconsiderations of classic understandings of how social relationships are modeled by economic relationships. By contrast, the next paradigm we’re about to discuss would attempt to challenge even the idea of doing analysis in the first place.
2.2.8 Postmodernism

The period beginning around 1980 was one which has come to be defined, in part, by the crisis of representation (Lewellen 2003:13). This period is known for the inclusion of postmodern critical theory in the anthropological canon. Further, it is a period that has become noteworthy for intricate review of classical works, like those by Boas, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown. Those authors were not simply mistaken because of theoretical or methodological errors. The postmodernists questioned their essential right to explain other cultures. Kurtz says that “According to Tedlock, the goal of a postmodern ethnography is to produce a ‘seamless text’ that depicts the ‘Other’ through a methodology dedicated to the ‘observation of participation’ instead of ‘participant observation’” (Tedlock 1992 quoted in Kurtz 2001:193).

Kurtz elaborates on this: “Postmodern anthropologists derive intellectual nourishment from the culture concept and their methodology conforms to the epistemology and practice of the idealist tradition in anthropology” (Kurtz 2001:194). Kurtz’s suggestion is that postmodernism is a rejection of aspirations toward science in anthropological thought. From a political anthropological standpoint, the fundamental rejection of previous anthropological paradigms means that there is little reference to other paradigms of anthropology. However, Kurtz contends that the processual model is the clear antecedent to much of postmodern political analysis (Kurtz 2001:197): processes of conflict, diachronic analysis, the rejection of formal political structures – all of which resemble the processual paradigm.

Postmodern political anthropology addresses the issues of representation “from the point of view of the people and the victims who are affected by these practices”
(Kurtz 2001:200), occasionally giving voice to those who do objectionable things. This form of representation can, at its best, provide a useful interpretation of political situations, one that might not be readily attainable by proponents of other political anthropological paradigms. The risk associated with postmodern political anthropology is ultimately the risk of all postmodern social science – if the point of the exercise is to question representation and the perspective of the author, where does it stop? What is the practical value of a science that refutes its own conclusions?

2.2.9 Globalization

The last perspective discussed by Lewellen is globalization. Lewellen sees globalization theory as one interrelated with postmodern theory. “Whereas previously, power was conceived as centered in the state or in individual leaders, globalization may be giving way to variants of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony as deriving from consent of the people to domination by a ruling elite… Such a notion is often explicitly or tacitly combined with a Foucauldian sense of surveillant disciplinary power that is inherent in discourse and suffused through social institutions such as development organizations” (Lewellen 2003:218). Indeed, power has become disconnected to traditional institutions in a global world, one which relies on a concepts of flow of power, through institutions in society, to be sure, but also “embedded in knowledge systems and in the institutions that dominate such knowledge” (Lewellen 2003:219). Lewellen identifies seven examples of “ways in which globalization awareness is bringing about significant reconceptualizations of the subject matter and theoretical perspectives of political anthropology” (2003:219). They are: the increasing diffusion and distancing of power; the decline of state-centered authority; the widespread democratization that has
accompanied neoliberal economics, especially since the 1990’s, when numerous individual and one-party dictatorships gave way to at least the simulacrum of popular participation; the emergence of ethnic nationalisms and other interest groups that have come into existence as adaptations to or defenses against globalization; the transnationalization and deterritorialization of power, including long-distance nationalism; the emergence of powerful illegal politico-economic groups; and, seventh, the normalization of non-state terrorism as a primary means of warfare. All of these instances are, to Lewellen, examples of how ideologies are essential to the understanding of these global phenomena and that global thinking cannot be contained within culture boundaries easily. Anthropology is well suited to making sense of these ideologies.

2.2.10 Some final thoughts on political anthropology
In the end, political anthropology is composed, historically of several eras but, as I discussed in the introduction to this work, I have not intended to imply that these eras are either discrete or chronologically bounded. As Lewellen’s discussion of global thinking reveals, the concepts of earlier generations of political thought are influencing contemporary work even as new ground is broken.

From the earliest period of the anthropology of politics, the objective has been to explain the social relationships that manage power in human society. The earliest attempts looked at the ways in which power was transformed through the evolutionary development of societies. The British structural-functionalists were the next to take up the mantle of explaining power, exploring the role of institutions in the maintenance of political order and stability, primarily through the concept of coercion. In response, processualists changed the focus to the instabilities inherent in political systems, looking
for ways in which to explain conflict rather than ways to explain equilibrium. At the same time, neo-evolutionists developed typologies that were dependent on relationships with causal factors, developing an explanatory power that is still compelling.

As an outgrowth reflecting the incorporation of more viewpoints and ideas, feminism and political economic thought challenged the assumptions of the discipline to date, reminding researchers to restore a sense of historical particularity to questions of political power and influence (political economy) and to question first principles, regarding the real meaning of the gender division of labor.

Postmodern thought represents an interesting digression in anthropological thought, because it challenges the assumption that there is an objective, knowable reality beyond the interpretation of the writers involved. Nevertheless, the value of postmodern thought in political anthropology is the attempt that the exponents of the paradigm have made in creating convincing portrayals of political situations. Postmodernism is at its best when it is exploring the crisis of representation and interpretation of cultural phenomena and when it is asking questions about the presumptions of the anthropologist. If, as Lewellen contends, globalization is an outgrowth of postmodernism, it is also a compelling argument for the value of postmodern thought (2003:219). Globalization accompanies the reinterpretation of power relationships: reconsiderations of givens are part of that postmodern reconsideration of the assumed benchmarks of the past.

With regard to the present study, it is intriguing to note the number of these ideas that persist. For example, the idea of situational alliances, first discussed in anthropological literature within the context of the segmentary lineage, has echoes in more recent discussions of alliances formed as hegemonic or counter hegemonic
arrangements based on social organization, whether through class, affiliation, or, even today, kingship (c.f. Wolf 1999:44-46, Crehan 2002:147-149). As political factions activate old alliances in times of struggle, they show similarities to the real or imagined kin bonds activated in the segmentary lineage. While neither author, to my knowledge, has seen this similarity, it is an indication that the rejected theoretical paradigms of the past are not without relevant contemporary insights. Perhaps the segmentary lineages of the past are, in fact, hegemonic formations: Asad’s criticism of Barthes’ interpretation of Swat culture (excerpted in Vincent 2002:65-81) certainly draw attention to the fact that kinship is not always the only form of social organization operating in a culture, no matter what may be the apparent circumstance. But the relevant criticism does not undercut the basic observation that political alliance was noted by early anthropologists and some of those political relationships bear at least superficial similarities to contemporary forms of political organization.

However, as we shall see, ideas from political economic anthropology are, perhaps, the most significant contributions to this present work, but the older traditions never really go away.
2.3 Ideology and Hegemony

In order to make explicit my understanding of local politics and to elaborate on the assumptions that I took with me into the field, it’s necessary to create clear definitions regarding the concepts of ideology and hegemony. Although I will go into some detail regarding the underpinnings of both terms, I will try to clarify my understanding of them.

It is my contention that all groups participating in a society possess ideology. Ideology, in the form of cultural superstructure, is an essential part of any culture or subculture that considers itself a distinct (if not discrete) group. For example, railroad engineers have a set of beliefs and values that are a significant part of their subculture (Gamst 1980) and that structure social relationships within the subculture, just as they also reflect social relationships that exist outside the subpopulation within the culture as a whole. For example, railroaders develop status and prestige depending on their competence, their tenure in the job, the difficulty of the tasks they undertake, and their success in doing them. That set of values constitutes part of the ideology of the railroader. Bankers have ideology, but so do coal miners, school-teachers, child-care workers, homemakers, and university presidents. So do ethnic and racial categories. So do class categories, if they are recognized by their members. Each possesses an ideology that explains or rationalizes their own understanding of themselves, their world, and their relationship with other categories.

Ideology becomes hegemonic when it begins to support a specific power structure or coalition of interested parties. At times, the coalition can be a strong, conscious set of
common interests, as in the case of corporate stockholders and corporate attorneys. Their common objectives overlap to a large degree, despite differences in terms of compensation and labor. Conscious attempts at coalition forming can appear to have many of the characteristics of collusion or collaboration about them, at least if you’re not a member of the coalition. However, at other times, the coalition may seem inadvertent, as in the case of ordinarily pro-labor blue-collar workers voting for a conservative candidate because they feel that their overall interests are better represented by a person who shares little in common with their labor interests. It is not the same ideology that sustains the relationship between the stockholder and the corporate attorney. It can have very different features; for example, the conservative politician might emphasize his dislike of illegal immigration and that might be the ideological device that allows the politician to obtain support from the blue-collar worker. Once in office, the elected official sustains the stockholder/attorney/blue-collar worker coalition by passing legislation that benefits his various constituents. This all becomes hegemonic when the politician, his constituents, and the institutional resources that all these members of the coalition represent, can be brought to bear to create a sense of inevitability, a sense that the relationship is natural and ordained. It doesn’t stop outsiders from continuing to generate that outsider perspective. As an analogy, tiny community radio stations keep broadcasting their alternative programming, even when their signal is blotted out by much more powerful transmitters in the area. Someday, when the larger stations go off the air, the tiny station may garner enough listeners to expand… and become hegemonic.

So, for the purpose of this work, the question of how political alliances are formed and the ways in which political alliances are sustained is a relevant one. How can a
political candidate attempt to enter an existing power structure? Can the finding of common ground, ideologically speaking, create a bridge between categories of political, social, economic, or other forms of social grouping? At what point do such groupings take the form of hegemonic formations, sustaining a new formation of the power structure and, theoretically, creating a set of ideas and institutions that can perpetuate themselves?

While local politics, in some ways, represent a difficult environment in which to test or explore questions of ideology (at least in its more polarizing forms) the coalition-building through common ideological ground is an inevitable part of the political process. Any politician seeking office must either attain the overwhelming (hegemonic) ideological support of the political power structure or garner sufficient ideological common ground from comparative outsiders that their coalition of outsiders can get the candidate into office. My objective in studying ideology and hegemony is to explore points at which these things occur: recognizing the outlines of hegemonic formations; the forming of ideological coalitions that run counter to the existing power structure; and the degree to which ideology/hegemony are related to the process of political campaigning.

To make clear my understanding of these concepts, I will review the literature on ideology and hegemony and then summarize it in a way which will make my use of the terms more clear.

2.3.1 Ideology

Ideology is a concept that can be extraordinarily elusive. Is it a mercurial concept, one that shifts from moment to moment as new parties enter an argument? Is it static and monolithic, a form of deterministic brainwashing? The purpose of this section
will be to explore the array of definitions of this term (Andrey Zorin references 16 definitions of the term (2001:58-59)!), both within and outside an anthropological context. Finally, I will conclude this section by emphasizing the work of two key anthropologists, Eric Wolf and Kate Crehan. Their work will also appear in the next section, about the related concept, hegemony.

The earliest definition of *ideology* cited by the Oxford English Dictionary is this:

“1. a. The science of ideas; that department of philosophy or psychology which deals with the origin and nature of ideas.” That sense of the term dates back to 1796. The language of origin is French. A later definition of the term is this one dating from the first years of the 20th century: “4. A systematic scheme of ideas, [usually] relating to politics or society, or to the conduct of a class or group, and regarded as justifying actions, [especially] one that is held implicitly or adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events.”

Another, more recent definition, developed by political scientists, is this:

“ideology is a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains social conditions, helps people understand their place in society and provides a program for social and political action” (Ball and Dagger 2002:5). Ball and Dagger proceed to observe that an ideology has four functions: explanatory, evaluative, orientative, and programmatic.

As we shall see, both the O.E.D. and Ball and Dagger definitions are related to current (and more particularly anthropological) definitions of the concept, but the relationship is not always clear as we explore historical uses of the term. Further, ideology must be understood within the context of political economic relationships, a fact
that is often masked by the determinative qualities of some definitions of the term. As we proceed, it should be understood that I am beginning with the assumption that, regardless of the seeming power of an ideology, that it is really more properly explained as a manifestation of power relationships rather than an independent causal factor.

2.3.2 Ideology: Early Uses

Although Williams (1976:126) cites an earlier date for the first use of the term in a political context, ideology becomes an important concept in the social sciences (and a term closer to OED definition 4, above) when Marx used the term as an element of his historical materialist concept, which we shall turn to momentarily. As an interesting digression, Williams’ discussion of the early use of the term includes an anecdote wherein the Emperor Napoleon decried the use of ideology by what he called “ideologues” (Williams 1976:126). In this Napoleonic instance, ideology would be defined as a set of beliefs that is used by some group of people to justify, rationalize, or recruit people to a specific cause. We will later explore some of the elements of Williams’ treatment, and see which associations are identified by his work.

Marx and Engels, however have a slightly different conception than Napoleon’s: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time, the ruling intellectual force” (Marx and Engels, 1972:64). This classic quotation situates Marxist interpretations of ideology in a clear fashion: ideology is a tool of the wealthy and powerful for influencing or enforcing their class interests on other segments of the society. The deployment of ideas into a coherent body of knowledge and that body’s subsequent use to reinforce existing power relationships is at the core of ideology. Larrain (1979:32-67) contends
that Marx’s conception of ideology stems from two trends during the enlightenment, “the philosophy of consciousness and the new scientific rationality” (1979:35). Marx, as a materialist, resisted the enlightenment conception of consciousness preceding being, asserting the contrary (1979:39). From there, it is not inconceivable that the sense of consciousness, awareness of one’s plight, would therefore be a byproduct of one’s quality of being, which is, in turn a byproduct of the way in which society is structured by and structures the environment through its productive capacity. If such is the case, then ideology is not changeable without alterations in the economic system that acts as a foundation for the consciousness structures that, in turn, create ideology. This is not to say that ideology is unchanging. Rather, according to Larrain, ideology changes as “contradictions evolve,” through the dialectical process, in the underlying economic system (Larrain 1979:49).

Larrain points out that readers and interpreters of Marx use the term ideology in different ways. In some cases, the term describes all systems of knowledge, in others more commonly, Marx uses the term to describe “a particular, distorted kind of consciousness which conceals contradictions” (Larrain 1979:50). Larrain contends that Marx himself did not use ideology to describe knowledge systems, instead using the term superstructure without using ideology as a modifier (in other words, according to Larrain, Marx avoided using phrases like “ideological superstructure”) to describe the knowledge that arises from the economic base. Instead, Marx, in collaboration with his colleague Engels, reserved ideology for use in describing the trickery used to maintain class relationships: false consciousness. Bailey and Gayle (2003:36) show the three tricks that Marx and Engels claimed were ways “by which knowledge is distorted into
ideology to serve the interests of the elite: 1) … dominant ideas become separated from
the empirical reality that created them; 2) … ideas are established as part of an order that
builds ‘mystical connections’ among those same ideas [so they] appear real rather than
manufactured; 3) the ideas or concepts then must be taken up and solidified or adapted by
theorists or advocates who represent them in history…” These three tricks, as Marx
would have them, make knowledge, which, in reality, is situated in a historical and
economic context, and reify it into a permanent, lasting, eternal truth. Later, in our
review of some features of the political landscape, we will see elements of this kind of
ideology employed by power-holders in the local political scene. Marx, in other words,
conceives ideology as a measure of the degree of deceit practiced by a ruling class over a
victimized class. Ideology is separated from knowledge in the sense that knowledge is
based on facts, while ideology is a manipulation of information designed to provoke a
certain outcome. As Larrain has it: “ideology is reaffirmed [in Marx’s The German
Ideology] as a consciousness which conceals contradictions in the interest of the
dominant class” (1979:60). Larrain points out later (1979:65-67) that ideology is distinct
but related to the idea of superstructure in the sense that all bodies of knowledge are part
of the superstructure, and ideology is, certainly, a form of knowledge. However, the use
to which the knowledge is put, in this sense, as a form of deception used to advance the
ruling class, can be described as the distinction between ideology and knowledge.

Lenin’s take on ideology differs somewhat compared to Marx. First, Lenin
differentiated between systems of knowledge, like science, and ideology. Lenin argued
that science was produced “outside the class struggle as the inevitable outcome of
philosophical and economic theories developed by intellectuals” (Larrain 1979:75).
Thus, he argues that the superstructure may be employed for purposes other than the reproduction of class relationships. As such, working class consciousness can exist as an alternative to ruling class consciousness. Lenin conceived ideology as streams of information that had varying levels of ability to capture the imagination of recipients in various segments of society. Ideology, encountered in Lenin’s *What is to be Done?*, is something that can either be socialist or bourgeois or a moderating third way that can undercut a move toward socialism (Lenin 1975:28-29). Williams also notes the existence of multiple threads of ideology in Lenin’s work (Williams 1976:129). Lenin uses ideology “in the sense of a set of cognitions and theories which express the interests of a class” (Larrain 1979:76). He turns ideology from a “restricted negative concept in Marx to a general positive concept” (1979:77), which Larrain contends is the dissolution of the concept’s practical value, in that it is no longer a critical concept. Ideology, according to Larrain’s interpretation of Lenin, becomes a manifestation of social life, an element of the culture that, although it primarily favors the ruling elites, is very much open to challenge. As we shall see, this relates to our conceptions of hegemony, discussed below.

Althusser’s commentaries on Lenin (1971) support this general contention but seem to revert to traditional Marxist interpretations of ideology as a single channel of concealing disinformation. Althusser goes so far as to suggest any philosopher is “ideologically, a petty bourgeois” (1971:17) and that philosophy, as a de-historicized stream of ideology, “will remain philosophy” (1971:66), meaning, philosophy is, itself, a tool of ideology because it obfuscates the relationship of philosophical concepts with the historical context that creates them. In the absence of such context, the concepts become reified, permanent monuments to the ideas of a narrow segment of the world’s thinkers.
But, he suggests that it is possible to learn a new, revolutionary consciousness. Part of this involves distinguishing between science, to which Marxism aspires, which is factual, and ideology, which is based on the methods used to conceal class relationships (see, for example, the distinction made on 1971:67). This is not easy, however, because, as Althusser observes, the units of the state which reproduce ideology (“ideological State apparatuses” or “ISA” – examples appear 1971:136-137 but discussion pervades the cited book), are pernicious. ISAs are not the coercive branches of government. Rather, they are the fonts of ideology and include educational, legal (although the law is also a coercive branch of government, and therefore a somewhat less ambiguous well-spring of power), political, trade-union (which Lenin contended would be the moderating ideological current that would undercut the true revolutionary program, as I discussed above – Lenin 1975:28-29), communication, and cultural ISAs. While coercive, repressive force secures cooperation with threats of violence and violence itself, ISAs secure cooperation of repressed peoples through complicity, by teaching people to behave in certain ways within the capitalist system. ISAs have four features (from Althusser 1971:146): 1), they reproduce the relations of production; 2), all of the various ISAs contribute toward this objective in a way that is appropriate to its nature (for example: “The political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political State ideology” (p. 146); 3) this concerted effort “is dominated by a single score, occasionally disturbed by contradictions” like the death throes of a previously dominant class or a the struggles of a current underclass (or, in the case of this project, the differences between two political candidates who are, after all, members of the same general class affiliation); 4), one ISA tends to predominate: the school. For obvious reasons, schools have a very significant
and far-reaching effect on disseminating ideology. Schools present conceptions of the ways in which the world work that are often in keeping with existing power relationships. Consider the deployment, during the Cold War, of anti-communist civics classes: each session was a continual refutation of the alternatives of capitalist democracy. The coercive power of the school environment reduces the resistance that the students have to the ideological barrage. Althusser suggests that ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971:153) and that ideology “has a material existence” (1971:155), two theses that lead him to suggest that ideology is expressed in practice. His contention is, in fact, that we ought to describe ideology as a form of practice, a concept that we will revisit shortly. In other words, the clues as to the ideology of a people and the relationship of the stated ideology to the material conditions of the exponents of ideology are revealed in their actions.

According to Larrain, Gramsci “also follows the trend away from a purely negative concept of ideology” (Larraine 1979:80). Ideology, for Gramsci, “is a superstructural expression of a contradictory reality, an expression of the ‘kingdom of necessity’ which embraces every class in society” (ibid.). In other words, Larrain notes that Gramsci is aware of the distinction between ideology and superstructure: ideology is an expression of superstructure, but superstructures are “an objective reality, where men gain consciousness of their positions and class goals” (ibid.). Gramsci distinguishes between “historically organic ideologies (those ‘which are necessary to a given structure’) and arbitrary or ‘willed’ ideologies” (Larrain 1979:81). Gramsci, according to Larrain (1979:82), differs with Lenin’s conception of Marxism generally and ideology in specific. Lenin held, after Marx, that educators were elements of the state’s ideological
control of a given society; Gramsci contended that educators were simply in need of education from the organic intellectuals of the proletariat. “While Lenin’s scientific ideology had to struggle against spontaneous consciousness,” writes Larrain (ibid.), “Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis expresses a historical spontaneous direction.” In other words, there is opportunity for knowledge/idea-based resistance to ideological dominance. Gramsci was effectively arguing for the vulnerability of dominant streams of ideology to assaults from without.

Gramsci’s contribution to discussions of ideology relate to his discussion of hegemonic ideology – that expression of the ideology of dominant classes (Larrain 1979:83). This presupposes the creation of ideas, of knowledge, from other quarters. Rather than try to draw a distinction (science versus ideology, a la Marx/Lenin), Gramsci contends that the production of knowledge is something that occurs throughout a society. For example, Gramsci suggests that there are times when demagogues can emerge as leaders; that is, when leadership can precede socioeconomic conditions as a force for change as ideas take on a force of their own (Gramsci 1957:174-176). The practical value of Gramsci is that he provides an escape from Marx’s determinism and Lenin’s subsequent work-around, the suggestion that Marx is science and ideology is deceit. Instead, Gramsci argues that the strength of Marx is that he is most aware of the contradictions of espousing ideas situated within a class structure. We will return to Gramsci momentarily.

Although this work is largely rooted in the area of political economic, and, especially, Marxist explanations of social processes, there were other theorists who have explored the concept of ideology. Some of these alternatives include Sigmund Freud, the
once widely-acknowledged father of psychology, and Emile Durkheim, the accepted father of sociology. Briefly, Larrain (1979) discusses both as being emblematic of a second trend in thought regarding ideology, one that stems from an effort to encompass irrational behavior and thought within a conception of social behavior. Freud’s ideology, according to Larrain (1979:69), is a way to give “a rational account of irrational behavior.” It is a response to social strain, a way of easing the ambiguities and concerns of life through the creation of stories. Durkheim, by contrast, looks at ideology as the opposite of science, a “collective representation instead of an innate pre-notion or purely distorted knowledge” (ibid.) as Freud and Marx, respectively, might have it. Again, note the similarity of these definitions to the functional explanations mentioned by Ball and Dagger earlier (Ball and Dagger 2002:5). Like Freud, Durkheim is examining ideology from a subjective position. Unlike Freud, Durkheim’s position seems to be that ideology is a mendacious reinterpretation of reality, rather than a simply misleading one that is a striving to present truth.

The schools of thought related to Marx, and his followers, and Freud and Durkheim and their followers diverge but are not unrelated. Next, we shall see how Clifford Geertz, for one, makes an effort to reunite, or at least reconcile the varying themes of their positions.

2.3.3 Ideology: Anthropological uses

Overlapping this discussion of ideology is another one, more specifically related to the field of anthropology. In 1964, Clifford Geertz discussed ideology in an article in Apter’s Ideology and Discontent. Geertz begins his article by noting that ideology, the term, had become a sort of ideology itself, based on the definitions of the time. In other
words, “ideology” had become a kind of intellectual slander rather than a concept that was meaningful from a social science standpoint. He sets out to create a useful, not to say scientific, definition of ideology. Geertz samples some of the existing commentaries on ideology, each more disparaging than the next (1964:49-51). Basically, Geertz says that it had gotten to the point, at the time of his writing, that people believed that ideology was a form of intellectual deceit, a form of deceit in which the one doing the deceiving is also the deceived. While a liar, at least, knows the real truth, but dissembles, the ideologue is fooled along with the audience. Whether this is the case is a separate matter, but Geertz, in this article, attempts to clarify some conceptions of ideology so that the term becomes a useful term in the social sciences, rather than an attack.

Geertz then suggests that there are two varieties of ideology discussed in the social sciences, what he calls interest theory and strain theory (1964:52). While interest theory is recognizably Marxist in origin, strain theory stems more particularly from the school of sociology epitomized by Freud’s conception or, alternately, Emile Durkheim’s view of ideology as a form of social static that interferes with the rational production of social behavior. The particulars of both variants of ideology are moot, however, because Geertz dismisses them as lacking “anything more than the most rudimentary conception of the processes of symbolic formulation” (1964:56). It is an inclusion of an understanding of the symbolic qualities of language and culture that is necessary in order to make sense of ideology.

Geertz posits that ideology appears to be a response to not just psychological strain or social strain, but to cultural strain, “an absence of cultural resources” (1964:64). This is what causes the formation of ideology: a disruption of cultural patterns. Geertz
suggests that as early polities formed, they were, at first, established based on the personal characteristics of individuals involved in the process (1964:66). A leader, for example, would lead based on his ability to raise troops to secure territory or based on his position as a big man in a redistribution system. Ideological power, in the form of spiritual eminence or magical power or simply the authority associated with a particular reign, becomes an outgrowth of the manifestations of worldly power, the trappings of the court, and the capacity, at some point, to levy martial power. Ideology originates in coercive power and comes to reproduce power through the manifestation of symbols of power. His interpretation of ideology is, in a sense, a synthetic one, combining the class/power-based origins of interest theory with the rationalizing (literally: making rational the irrational) qualities of strain theory and encompassing them within an ethnographic framework of symbols.

By contrast, Godelier (1977) interprets Marxist conceptions of ideology with reference to the ethnographic record. In his piece, “Fetishism, religion, and ideology” (1977:169-185), Godelier elaborates on the Marx/Engels concept of ideology, extrapolating a general theory of ideology from their comments regarding religious formations of ideology. Pre-capitalists societies, the earliest manifestation of ideological formation, create religions, through the practice of religious ideologies. Early religions imagine an alternate world, populated with entities that share many of the characteristics of human beings. This proposition, argues Godelier, is supported both by the anthropological literature and by Marx (1977:177). By extension, this primitive formation of religious ideology can also be said to exist in capitalist societies as well. While Godelier is not so naïve as to think that Marxism has the answer to every question
(Wolf (1999) quotes Godelier as referring to some Marxist concepts as *caduques* – “null and void”), he does argue that Marx is remarkably durable as a framework for interpreting culture in general and, specifically, the relationship between ideology and historical materialism. He writes that “what is ideological is any idea that *legitimizes* an existing social order, along with the relations of domination and oppression that it contains within it… any idea can become ideological the moment it enters the service of a dominant social group and presents this domination as a natural phenomenon” (1978:766). Godelier explains that the domination of one segment of society over others is based not, primarily on violence and coercion but, rather, “the consent of the dominated to their domination” (1978:767). In other words, Godelier seems to render “ideology” synonymous with the term “hegemony”, which would appear to recapitulate earlier interpretations of Marx’s use of the term.

In the comments section following Godelier’s 1978 piece, Oriol Pi-Sunyer (1978:769-770) points out this passage from Marvin Harris regarding the durability of state formations once they have been set in motion as a way of agreeing with Godelier:

> The evolutionary viability of the state rests in large measure on the perfection of institutional structures that protect the ruling class from confrontation with coalitions of alienated commoners. These structures fall into two basic categories: (1) institutions that control the content of ideology; and (2) institutions that physically suppress the subversive, rebellious, and revolutionary actions of alienated individuals and groups. – Harris 1971:406

Pi-Sunyer does not take issue with the basic assertion of Godelier, that “the forces of production are embedded in the network of social relations and that the resulting structure is maintained and supported by ideology” (1978:770). However, Pi-Sunyer does object to Godelier’s assertions that a single institutional superstructural element (religion, for
example) would have a determinant effect on ideology, regardless of the complexity of the society in question.

Geertz returns to the fray, after Godelier, and attacks the assertion that more systematic interpretations of symbols are called for. Zorin notes that, while Geertz was moving toward hermeneutics and away from structuralism, it needed to be understood that “His skepticism towards excessive generalizations and scientistic utopias did not lead him to deny the principle of scientific investigation itself” (2001:64). This revolt against absolute interpretations is something that we will see in the work of Asad.

Talal Asad (1979) critiques the whole proposition of attempting to find meaning and exposing structures underlying ideology, as an anthropological research proposition. To those who would argue that researchers should develop “a proper science of the symbolic” (1979:620), Asad suggests “there cannot be a general theory of ideology, a theory which will specify the universal pre-conditions, significances and effects of discourse” (1979:620). On the other hand, Asad argues that the efforts to describe ideology as directly obfuscatory discourse designed to conceal are improper because “such a view attributes at once too much ideology and also too little: too much because the maintenance and continuity of a total social formation is supposed to depend on an integrated set of concepts, and too little because the discourse in which ideologies are articulated is identified as having an essential, univocal significance which establishes at once its status as a false belief, and as social determinant” (Asad 1979:622). In what can only be one of the most amusing metaphors likely to be seen in an analysis of ideology as a concept, Asad draws a humorous comparison between anthropology and a certain popular film that clearly indicates his opinion of the potentially frivolous nature of
indulging this variety of analysis because “the uncovering of ‘essential meanings’ is itself a production in discourse” (1979:622). He explains that his effort to identify the shortcomings of the efforts at adding rigor to symbolism and the limitations of the Marxist model are not an attempt to “rescue the ultimate integrity of personal experience” (1979:623) but rather that “the whole business of looking for and reproducing the essential meanings of another society’s discourse (its ‘authentic culture’) should be problematised far more drastically than it has been in social anthropology” (ibid.). In the absence of such an over-arching theory of ideology, anthropologists should proceed with caution before making definitive statements regarding the meaning or interpretation of a given event or, more generally, a culture.

By contrast, Eric Wolf’s take on ideology stems from an analysis of culture that is based on modes of production. Lewellen (2003:212-213) describes Wolf’s classic *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) as an attempt to integrate anthropology and the world-system perspective. In that work, Wolf refines Marx’s conceptions of modes of production, condensing them into three modes with significant differences: kin-ordered, tributary, and capitalist. Each mode has its own characteristic methods of managing ideology in order to serve the social structure of the society. Wolf takes the position that even the debates on the subject of ideas, far from sterile, academic disputes between disinterested parties are, in fact, ideological debates that support the contentions of particular class interests (1999:64):

In following the contestations between the proponents and opponents of Enlightenment through Reason, and their after effects, it becomes clear that these were not abstract theoretical debates. The affirmations of utterly opposed claims to the truth became arguments and counterarguments over power and status advanced by contending interests.
In other words, the dispute is, itself, part of the larger battlefield between classes.

From the standpoint of ideology, one of the most significant articles from Wolf is “Ideas and Power” (2001:370-382). The article begins with a criticism of both materialism and symbolic anthropology and their interpretation of ideas (and the formation of ideology). Nevertheless, Wolf betrays his basic affiliation with materialist conceptions of ideas in his more or less scathing criticism of symbolism: “The symbolists also, all too often, present us with statements about symbolic interconnections, without much attention to how these connections came to be established or how strongly or weakly the connecting links among symbols may be, once they have been put in place” (2001:373). It is not my objective to mount a critique of symbolism beyond this, however, so I will turn to positive statements in Wolf regarding the structural relationship of symbols and social power to the world of natural resources:

Such structural power has a double nature. On the one hand, it can and must produce measurable effects in the real world. On the other hand, it must engage in symbolic work to construct a world in which power and its effects come to be seen as in “the nature of things.” – Wolf 2001:375.

Wolf argues, in this piece, that the social and symbolic manifestations of culture find their origin in the mode of production practiced by the society in question: “Thus, where kinship dominates social relations in the deployment of social labor, signification will gather impetus and strength precisely from the basic contradiction that makes kinship possible” (Wolf 2001:376). This has an echo of Godelier’s discussion of analogy (1977:176-177) in pre-capitalist societies but with a more explicit interpretation of the relationship to the means and mode of production. Wolf reminds us that symbols don’t come from some Platonic or Hegelian ideal but, rather, “are produced by human beings
and connected by them with signifiers in the course of social processes that take place in a tangible and observable world” (Wolf 2001:378). Cultural ideas, he argues, can be used to make and do things, and they can also be used to exhort and enjoin. Both instances are forms of cultural ideas, but the ideas that can invoke power are the ones that he calls ideological.

His 1999 volume, *Envisioning Power*, is full of examples of ideology as mobilized in the interest of power. There are no simple examples in this volume. Rather, the examples express the subtlety of the use of ideas as a way of reinforcing power relationships. His discussion of National Socialist Germany (1999:197-271), for one example, constitutes a harrowing examination of the use of ideology in service to a mode of production and the degree to which ideology can motivate actions that advance the mode in question through the use of seemingly irrational fantasies regarding the operation of the world, the causes of its problems, and their solutions. Overall, these ideas became the framework of ideas deployed by the ideologues acting as allies of the Nazis. In some cases, these ideologues were Nazi party officials or their official allies; in other cases, the fonts of ideology were intellectuals, politicians, and educators who advanced elements of the overall Nazi worldview as manifestations of their own, independent, albeit class-interested, work outside the official membership rolls of the party. A racist scholar, for example, in early 19th century France or Germany may not have been an explicit member of the Nazi Party, but their contributions were no less a part of the Nazis’ message.

Wolf relates the origins of ideology, as a concept, to the Enlightenment’s quest for “Truth,” a concept that has been treated elsewhere (for example, Vincent 2002, or Wolf’s own treatment of the origin of the concept: 1999:25-26, 31-32). Wolf, however,
makes it clear that the ultimate objective is the Marxist one: to not just expose the falsehoods of dominant ideology but to establish a relationship between the ideology of a society and its specific mode of production (2001:379). Ideology has three processes associated with it: 1) reiteration of ideas across many domains, all “the contexts, meanings, and purposes it certifies as right and true” (Wolf 2001:380); 2) reproduction “on different levels of sociocultural complexity… [through] the extension upward of the same utterances or rituals from the level of the household to the levels settlement, region, or state” (ibid.); and, 3) creation and elaboration of rituals, which “[push] aside everyday reality by occluding the channels of ordinary discourse through the imposition of imperative sequences of action that must be followed is ritual is to achieve its goal” (ibid.). This trio of processes operationalizes the concept of ideology and explains the mechanism by which ideology functions – I will quote Wolf at length:

At this point, we can see how such an ideological operator connects up with ideologically constituted ritual. Ritual activates the operator through its performances. These performances harness and channel social energy in energetic but logically meaningless action, and they do so in the service of logically meaningless and illusory signifiers. The ultimate effect of ritual and its guiding concept lies not in the genesis of particular specifiable meanings but in the maintenance and elaboration of ideologically charged chains of signification, whose function is to underwrite and enlarge the fund of social power exercised by structurally licensed categories in the domination of society. – Wolf 2001:382

It must be remembered that Wolf’s 2001 piece, referenced above, should not be regarded as the end of the argument regarding ideology. The work that forms the basis of that piece was done in the early eighties (Wolf: 370). Although Wolf doesn’t repudiate the ideas on display there (Wolf 1999 is a clear example that he still holds many of the same concepts at the core of his work; we will see some more from the 1999 work later in
this document), other entrants into the field bear consideration. For notable example, there is the confluence of language and ideology.

2.3.4 Ideology and Language
Paul Friedrich’s (1989) work is a statement in this area. Friedrich describes two forms of critical thought: one motivated by a scientific-rational kind of analysis, the other motivated by an emotional or ethical appeal. One of the key objectives of this work is to define ideology in a way that will be consonant with the unification of the need to analyze culture scientifically while also providing a social critique, an emotional appeal intended to restore a sense of moral outrage or justice to inquiry, through value judgements. What he subsequently creates is a trio of “common sense” definitions that are reminiscent of Geertz’s discussion of a “man-on-the-street” definition (Geertz 1964:52). First, “ideology is the basic notions or ideas that the members of a society hold about a fairly definite, if not bounded set or area such as honor, matrilineal affiliation, or the division of labor, and the interrelations and implications of such sets of notions” (Friedrich 1989:301). Alternately, “ideology is a system, or at least an amalgam, of ideas, strategies, tactics, and practical symbols for promoting, perpetuating, or changing a social and cultural order; in brief, it is political ideas in action” (ibid.). The third definition of ideology is defined as “a misleading metaphysics… [or] idealistic mumbo-jumbo” (ibid.), designed to obfuscate power relations or, in any case, to describe a phenomena where “the other fellow’s ideas [as] wrong-headed, illusory, or downright evil” (ibid.).

For Friedrich, these various definitions are problematic because they are oversimplistic and, frankly, negative. Friedrich suggests paring these definitions down to the
useful pieces and reassembling it into a coherent definition, which results in the “analytically priceless, mainly Marxist notion of ideology as a set or at least amalgam of ideas, rationalizations, and interpretations that mask or gloss over a struggle to get or hold onto power, particularly economic power, with the result that the actors and ideologues are themselves largely unaware of what is going on” (1989:302). From a practical standpoint, the common-sense definition is interrelated with the critical, Marxist definition. These terms complement each other even though they are, in terms of purpose, at odds with each other.

Friedrich’s next point relates to language and drawing relationships between the levels of meaning in language and the levels of meaning in, first, political economy and, next, ideology. Since the focus of this work is ideology, I will skip the section related to this relationship except to acknowledge that, as levels of abstraction exist in language, they also exist in political economy (speakers/workers, messages/commodities, and speech/variable capital to name a few analogies – Friedrich 1989:303). Further, I will move past the definition of language, neat though it is, and, instead, focus on the elements of language that Friedrich uses as particular examples of the deployment of language and ideology. Friedrich draws attention to the use of tropes (figurative language as well as linguistic constructions designed for poetic or rhetorical purposes; Friedrich discusses irony as an example) and metonymy/synecdoche (reusing a “word or similar symbol in a new, associated meaning” – Friedrich 1989:305-306) as ways to reproduce or, indeed, to produce power relationships. The use of these linguistic devices underscores the need for another conception of ideology, which Friedrich calls linguacultural ideology. The term linguacultural refers to the fact that language and
culture share a common universe, according to Friedrich (1989:306). The objective of
the new term is to “get rid of the decades-long balancing act between ‘language and
culture… and to recognize that the real world and much of our ongoing research involve
a common ground that is shared by both” (1989:307). It results in a conception of
ideology that “touches on everything from grassroots technology and folk metaphysics to
the philosopher’s metaphysics” (ibid.). To summarize, as Friedrich says in his
conclusion: “Language is related to ideology and political economy in many ways, often
through the workings of tropes, such as irony or synecdoche, as realized, repeated, and
recreated in the ongoing, on-the-ground, partly ad hoc synthesis and practice of flesh-and
blood individuals in business meetings, poetry readings” and so forth (1989:309).

The last major work I would like to discuss, within this category of linguistic
(linguacultural?) conceptions of ideology is from a work by Woolard and Schieffelin
(1994). They point out that in what they call “neutral” (1994:57) interpretations of
ideology, the term ideology often “encompasses all cultural systems of representation”
(ibid.). In “critical” (ibid.) conceptions of ideology, the term is “reserved for only some
aspects of representation and social cognition, with particular social origins or functional
or formal characteristics” (ibid.). However, rather than simply recapitulating some of the
work I have previously cited, they go on to say that there is a second way of dividing
types of ideology, and that is by examining the “siting of ideology”, sites of specific
language practice (ibid.): “An alertness to the different sites of ideology may resolve
some apparent controversies over its relevance to the explanation of social or linguistic
phenomena” (1994:54). Ideology, to Woolard and Schieffelin, is not a kind of falsity to
be debunked. It’s more complicated than that. Regardless of the truth value of a given
ideology, they have tangible effects on real world situations as in the case of linguistic nationalism (1994:60-61), where an ideology of national identity has led to both the oppression of minority language groups and, ironically, their preservation through the use of the same rhetoric. (As an aside, it becomes clear that the intentions of the fonts of ideology (pundits, professors, lawyers, priests) are linked to the effects of ideology, but not in a deterministic sense. At times, the intentions are subverted.) Efforts to standardize language, through the use of orthographies, standards of literacy, and so forth, constitute ways in which ideology is recapitulated through sites within the performance of language. When someone is chided for using Black English Vernacular instead of Standard Written English, a language ideology is being employed, and, therefore, a larger conception of ideology that privileges some elements of society, as discriminated by their language performance, and disadvantages others. Language also remains a contested ideological ground, too. There are streams of resistance, including those who choose not to speak the “official” language or valued linguistic style of a given area. This piece is valuable both because it displays the ways in which language can be used to explore ideology, in the sense of replication of ideology as well as the manifestations of ideology specific to language usage. Further, the piece is an attempt to rally linguistic anthropologists to the standard of linguistic explorations of social theory.

As a final comment in this subsection, it should be pointed out that these language performance manifestations of ideology are, of course, symptoms rather than the disease. The pungent ironies and incisive wit, the clever metaphors, and vicious political slanders, all of them are functionally meaningless unless they are empowered by the structural and infrastructural elements of the society. Wolf, in a discussion of Bourdieu and Wacquant,
(1992:148, cited in Wolf 1999:56), reminds us “that the speech-act lacks power and validity unless it is institutionally authorized and carried out by a person with the appropriate cultural credentials… competence in enacting performative speech is both a source of power and a demonstration of it.”

Crehan’s contribution to this discussion relates to a fine-tuning of the idea of ideology (mostly by demystifying some of the uses to which the Gramscian conception of ideology and hegemony have been put by other scholars) and a consideration of the origins of ideology – that is, where ideology comes from in a given society, rather than the origins of the term. Ideology, according to Crehan, is not a synonym for hegemony (2002:174). Hegemony “always involves practical activity” (2002:174), but it also deploys ideology in its furtherance. Crehan notes a seeming contradiction in Wolf’s work that illustrates the Gramscian sense of the term ideology. Wolf in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) seems to make a clear statement regarding the deterministic relationship between the economic base, the creation of class, and the rest of a given society, including the ideological domain (Crehan 2002:183). By contrast, Crehan suggests that Wolf’s later work, *Envisioning Power* (1999) focuses on ideology as a primary component of culture (Crehan 2002:187-188). Crehan says that the key lies in Gramsci: by mapping topographies of power, exploring the historical and political economic origins of ideological production. We will explore this further in the chapter on hegemony.

### 2.3.5 Ideology: Defined

Over the course of this section, I have attempted to examine some of the ways in which ideology has been defined over the years, some of the ways in which ideology has
been employed by anthropologists, and some brief ruminations on the admixture of ideology and language and political power. As we shall see in subsequent sections, ideology is a topic that recurs in our exploration of political power and formations of elites contesting to access it.

For the purposes of my work, I propose the following definition of ideology, one that bears some similarity to the cultural materialist definition of superstructure (Harris 1979),

**Ideology** (n.) – A set of values, beliefs, and interpretations of the world that facilitates the continued operation of a given culture or subculture by explaining or rationalizing that group’s relationship to the means of production. Given the assumption that ideology is a byproduct of material, economic relationships in a given society, it must be understood that ideology does not have a deterministic effect on other aspects of the society. Rather, it is a social lubricant, making some alternatives more palatable, or more comprehensible than others.

One essential feature of my understanding of this term is the idea that ideology is neither monolithic nor explicitly mendacious (in the sense of false consciousness). Some Marxist definitions of ideology have rendered ideology as synonymous with false consciousness, in the sense that any instance of ideology was a rationalization of the existing, unequal power relationships inherent in a class-differentiated society. While those rationales are present in many of the streams of subaltern ideology, there is not one interpretation that is distributed without variation to all members of a society. We shall see in the subject on hegemony that even the systemic advantages accruing to those who benefit from hegemonic control of a society are not monotone – they are a synthesis of the values, beliefs, and understandings of the various groups that form the hegemonic
bloc. In other words, even in situations of power disparity, there is still diversity.

Outside the hegemonic bloc, different ideas abound.

Regarding the interests of the proponents of ideology, it should be noted that a
given ideology may run counter to the objective interests of a given cultural group. For
example, blue collar workers voting conservative politicians into office because they
have erroneous assumptions about the relationship of conservative politicians and issues,
like illegal immigration, that concern the workers. However, much of ideology is simply
a means of perpetuating the group, establishing criteria for success, or suggesting kinds
of appropriate behavior.

2.3.6 Hegemony

Like ideology, hegemony is a word that is hard to define. Many definitions have
been written for this word, from prosaic, dictionary definitions, to technical jargon. In
this comparatively brief section, I will attempt to synopsize some of the comments on
hegemony and try to explore some practical uses to which the term can be put by social
scientists. The earliest proponent of the term in the sense that I would like to use it, was
Antonio Gramsci, the linguist-turned-revolutionary-turned-martyr, whose *Prison
Notebooks* have been an inspiration to many social theorists. In discussing this term, we
will begin with him. His definition of this term, relies on Gramsci’s interpretation of
leadership, according to Kurtz (1996:106), and is based on two complementary practices:

In one, domination, [the political formation] uses coercion and force
against those who resist its authority and power. In the other, hegemony,
it uses intellectual devices to infuse its ideas of morality to gain the
support of those who resist or may be neutral, to retain the support of
those who consent to its rule, and to establish alliances as widely as
possible to enable the creation of an ethical political relationship with the
people.
Kurtz’s definition is not without detractors, however. Later in the same piece, Kurtz notes that the intellectual tradition associated with hegemony mostly stems from the 1970’s work done by Raymond Williams (who I discuss below, in the section titled Hegemony: The Present History), a connection that Kurtz suggests is in error with reference to the putative originator of the term in its sociocultural sense, Gramsci.

Crehan contends that Williams’ interpretation of Gramsci in the commonly cited 1977 work *Marxism and Literature* (referenced in 84 separate works according to the search engine Web of Science!) is fine within the narrow context in which Williams uses terms like ideology and hegemony. A closer reading of Williams on Gramsci, Crehan contends, shows that “Williams is not attempting to provide a full account of hegemony in Gramsci, he is arguing specifically against the way in which ideology has tended to be theorized within the Marxist tradition” (Crehan 2002:173), which can in turn lead to an assumption on the part of Williams’ readers that “hegemony can then all too easily be taken as referring solely to the domain of ideas, beliefs, meanings and values” (Crehan 2002:173) which is neither Williams’, nor Gramsci’s intent. Kurtz’s claim regarding Williams’ followers and their error regarding Gramsci is not universally accepted. For example, Smith summarizes the term hegemony and provides a history of the later-20th-Century exponents of the term (2004), yet fails to include reference to Kurtz’s work (or, for that matter, Crehan’s 2002 work; the omission of Crehan is particularly troublesome because of her close reading of Gramsci).

Raymond Williams in his *Keywords* (1976:117-118) discusses hegemony within a historical context. According to Williams, in its earliest form the word is used synonymous with words like “supreme” and “predominant” or, simply, “dominant.” Like
ideology’s meaning shift over time, hegemony today means something similar to those words, but the specifics of the definition have altered, in part because of the shift in word meanings over time, but also because of the compulsion on the part of social scientists to inject precision into the term. In some cases, this effort to make the definition more exact has been useful but, in other situations, the imprecision has simply been exacerbated by the ambiguity of jargon.

A definition of the term that is comes more or less directly from anthropology is Gavin Smith’s, an update, if you will, of Williams’ definition. It appears in Joan Vincent’s own collection of keywords associated with political anthropology, entitled *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics* (Smith 2004:216-230). Smith’s brief definition is this:

*Hegemony is about the mastering of history. That is to say, it is about praxis: the use of people’s will and agency to drive their own history into the future; and it is about the weight (or lightness) of the past, carried on the shoulders of the present.* – Smith 2004:217

In this sense, hegemony becomes the degree to which a society controls or reinforces a specific interpretation of history, the degree to which it employs ideology to reinforce power relationships, and the degree to which there are opportunities to respond to the given version of these interpretations. This definition is straightforward enough to start with, but there are some subtleties to the definition that should be mentioned. Perhaps it would be wise to begin with some history of the term.

2.3.7 Hegemonic History: Gramsci and others

One characteristic of hegemony that must be discussed at the start is the fact that the scholar most closely associated with the concept was unable (whether through
inability or duress) to give a precise definition of the term. Antonio Gramsci wrote extensively on hegemony in his *Prison Notebooks*. However, his work, since it was done while he was incarcerated, was intentionally obscure on some points, because of Gramsci’s not unreasonable concern with prison censorship. As a consequence, some aspects of his insightful interpretation are ambiguous to say the least.

Some other biographical points related to Gramsci are salient and may have contributed to both the ambiguity of his work and the wealth of ideas contained in it. He was an outsider within the nascent Italian national culture, having been born in Sardina. He was trained in linguistics. He became a Marxist activist and revolutionary just at the moment that Mussolini-style fascism gained ascendancy in Italy, partially as a response to the perceived success of the Russian Revolution (Smith 2004:218).

As a brief digression, it has been argued that, prior to Gramsci, Croce actually created some of the concepts associated with hegemony (Jacobitti 1980:68-69). Croce was an enormously influential Italian intellectual who believed that only through a kind of cultural leadership and a return to Italian-style idealism could intellectual life be saved from the false positivism of the 19th century. In a manner not dissimilar to Marx’s rehabilitation of Hegel, Gramsci reacted to this idealism and developed a new configuration of this idea of leadership in his ideas related to intellectuals and ideology. While Gramsci agreed that “the ‘ethno-political’ sphere, that is today the ideological, moral, and cultural cements which bond a society together” (Forgacs 1988:190) are very important, as Croce believed, Gramsci further believed that these things were not the ultimate causal factor in sculpting society: the forces of economic power were. Like
Marx, Gramsci rebelled against the idealism of an eminent figure in intellectual life. With Marx, it was Hegel, with Gramsci, it was Croce (Jacobitti 1980:69 footnote 7).

I believe it is now time to discuss the relationship of language and hegemony before I move on to discussing anthropologists working in this area. Language is an important part of ideology, culture, and hegemony. At a basic level, language acts as a vehicle for the transmission of culture. Surely, none of these things would be possible without recourse to language. However, Gramsci trained as a linguist and some argue (Ives 2004:16) that the origin of Gramsci’s ideas regarding hegemony came from his training in linguistics rather than his avidity for Marx. Ives suggests two large ideas related to Gramsci’s work in linguistics and, subsequently, his use of linguistic concepts. First, “for Gramsci, there is no firm demarcation between language and non-linguistic social structures” (Ives 2004:19). As generations of scholars have argued since then, the symbols that we use have an enormous impact on how we actually perceive or think about the object under discussion. For example, referring to a person of African American ancestry as “Black,” “African American,” or any one of the several more unpleasant terms directly affects the way that we think about that person as well as replicating power relationships that are part of the hegemonic relationship. Even the act of simply designating a person using a reference to their race (itself a cultural construct), sets them apart from “normal” people, adjusting the way in which the speaker and his audience relate to the designee.

Gramsci worked on language his entire life, even in prison, and wrote extensively about grammar and literacy. The other key point that Ives makes regarding Gramsci’s linguistic influences is that, “since, for Gramsci, language is based on metaphor, the
philosophy of praxis can use linguistic terms and models metaphorically in other realms of social inquiry and action” (Ives 2004:19). Language becomes the key to social criticism because of its close tie with every form of culture, philosophy, history, nationality, et multiple cetera. The term, hegemony, is, in fact, a translation of Gramsci’s Italian *egemonia*, which is one of three linguistic terms that make frequent appearances in his writings (Ives 2004:17).

Perhaps because of the influence of Crocean rigor, Gramsci was concerned with the imprecision of some conceptual terminology associated with leftist thought. He was interested in the ability of subaltern power to resist or overthrow dominant classes. However, in the Russian Revolution, the state had thoroughly weakened civil society, thus rendering itself vulnerable to a mobilized intellectual middle class that was unopposed by a native, reactionary intellectual class. On the other hand, Italian society was composed of a comparatively weak state and a powerful civil society that had tradition, political influence, and cultural dominance over the Italian people. A Russian-style revolution was probably not going to be possible in Italy for this reason: assaults on the state apparatus would only claim the “outer ditch” of the cultural, social, and economic defensive forces that preserved the existing social relationships. This situation called for different revolutionary practice than the Russian scenario (Smith 2004:218-219).

To that end, Gramsci began developing a new thesis based on a reconception of civil society and a reconception of culture. Gramsci saw civil society as “the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private,’” an ensemble that is at odds with what he termed “political society” or “the state” (Forgacs 1988:306). Gramsci argued that civil society,
as a concept, could not be seen as independent of the state or the economy. History had created each, and each was a byproduct of long-term dialectical relationships with the others (Smith 2004:219). Smith, in discussing this point, uses this metaphor: “the possibility of certain kinds of conduct in [either civil society or political society] arose from the offstage rumblings in the other” (ibid.). As each transformed over time, the struggles of power and role forced each segment of society to relinquish some things and to assume others. Perhaps religion was fused with state power at some point, but at odds with state power at another.

Culture was a term that also takes on revolutionary connotations in Gramsci’s hands. He was concerned about differences in culture between the industrial north and the agrarian south as well as differences in culture between the “formal propagation of ‘national’ culture by schools, churches, law courts at one level and folklore and practical wisdom at a second” (Smith 2004:220). Gramsci began to consider the importance of intellectuals in social movements, both as creators of culture and enforcers of cultural norms. He described two kinds of intellectuals: the traditional intellectual, who “brings into contact the peasant masses with the local state administration”, especially in peasant/rural cultural environments (Forgacs 1988:308) – priests, schoolteachers, local political officials; and the organic intellectual, who emerges as a result of historical and societal changes and can be said to be a product of a class or a culture – labor leaders, local loud-mouths or trouble-makers, respected neighbors who have resisted the power structure in some way.

Smith (2004:220-221) argues that organic intellectuals and organic ideology are organic in the structural sense, meaning that their ideological discourse arises from their
need to explain the society in a way that promotes the growth of the society. Smith
discusses the role of market ideology in this capacity – “The idea that the market
provides a perfect mechanism for distributing goods and services through society would
be one example of a highly effective and practical organic ideology” (ibid). Gramsci
states that organic intellectuals are also the nascent revolutionaries among the working
classes, yearning to break free from ideological bondage: “… every ‘essential’ social
group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an
expression of a development of this structure, has found… categories of intellectuals
already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent a historical continuity
uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social
forms” (Forgacs 1988:302). In other words, organic intellectuals and organic ideology
serve the interest of explaining (not to say rationalizing) a social structure or, indeed, a
change in the structure. All societies and all segments of society have organic
intellectuals/ideologies, but some segments of society lack the wherewithal to advance
into dominant positions. All successful social movements have organic
intellectuals/ideologies which have served to guide or, at least, reflect the movement
toward some goal. Smith argues that the distinguishing characteristic between the
“rationalistic” and organic varieties of ideology is that organic ideology is capable of
making material changes (or resisting change) in the way things are done (2004:221-
222).

Ultimately, this leads us to a discussion of hegemony from a Gramscian
standpoint. Since Gramsci’s concern was about the ability of a society to effect social
change, it is necessary for him to explain how social processes work in a way which is
not simply deterministic. If we are to assume, as some vulgar materialists have done, that only economic change can determine societal change (change in the superstructural elements), then the only hope for revolutionary change is that the economic system will be transformed through forces that may well be beyond the capacity of human beings. Gramsci could not wait for such a spontaneous change. Instead, he posited a role for organic intellectuals (as opposed to the status quo defending traditional intellectual) in creating or sustaining social movements. The propagation of such a counter-hegemonic ideology could lead to an outsider interpretation ascending to hegemonic status.

Hegemony, while it incorporates ideology, is not limited to it. Multiple ideologies exist in society, each contending to raise its accompanying structural system to dominant status. If ideology were the only thing needed for social change, society would change on a moment-by-moment basis. Instead, Gramsci contended that there were fields of power, areas of influence, structural and infrastructural aspects of society, and that to be hegemonic, an “effective will” needed to arise within that context (Smith 2004:222). As Roseberry puts it: “What hegemony constructs is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination” (1994:361). Ideology is transmitted from numerous sources, but it is the hegemonic privileging of some ideologies, the appropriation of other ideologies, the dismissal of still others, that creates and recreates the power relationships.

One of Kurtz’s assertions regarding Gramscian hegemony are clear enough: “Fundamental to Gramsci’s hegemonic practices are political and cultural agents whom Gramsci calls traditional and organic intellectuals...[whose job is] to provide the
direction for hegemonic processes… It is the intellectuals who contest for the minds and support of the masses and create the alliances necessary either to sustain or establish a hegemonic formation unified under the moral principles of an intellectual leadership” (Kurtz 1996:108). The very fact that they are capable of contesting at all indicates that the concept of ideology must not be rendered synonymous with hegemony. Rather, it should be understood that there are alternatives, propagated by agents within a society who can be called intellectuals, who present ideological explanations for the affairs of human beings. Certain intellectuals, given access to structural power – of both an economic and political nature, are able to form the alliances described by Kurtz and create that hegemonic formation.

To conclude with Gramsci, if not the discussion of hegemony, I will return to a brief discussion of his biography. After years of malevolent neglect at the hands of the Italian Fascist prison system, Gramsci’s body failed him. He was released from prison only to die a few days later. His work never really left public consideration, but it was only in the 1970’s that a great deal of critical engagement with the work began to emerge.

2.3.8 Hegemony: The Present History

In 1977, Raymond Williams published *Marxism and Literature*. This brief volume updated and interpreted the concept of hegemony, among other objectives. In that book, Williams expanded on his *Keywords* etymological definition, describing hegemony as going “beyond ‘culture’ as previously defined, in its insistence on relating the ‘whole social process’ to specific distributions of power and influence… What is decisive [about the distinction between hegemony and culture/ideology] is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs [ideology], but the whole lived social process as
practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values” (R. Williams 1977:108-109). This process is historically contingent; a specific set of ideas, applied to another historical/geographic circumstance, probably would not result in the same outcome. Authors like the Comaroffs (1991) elaborated and critiqued Williams’ position, but reaffirmed the assertion that I’ve described here, that specific historical and cultural processes that resonate throughout a society, a position that would be difficult and undesirable for modern anthropologists to assail.

Crehan contests the position of the Comaroffs. First, she notes that the Comaroffs rely heavily on Williams interpretation of Gramsci, despite the fact that the Comaroffs themselves note the paucity of specific references to Gramsci’s work (2002:168-169). Crehan also objects to the Comaroffs’ assertion that the term hegemony is actually a relatively empty symbol, one that is open to alternate interpretations (2002:173). More substantively, Crehan takes the Comaroffs to task for their conception of hegemony. The Comaroffs definition of hegemony, as identified by Kurtz (1996:122) is: “that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies – drawn from a historically situated cultural field – that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it.” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:23). This quote is drawn from a brief quotation from Gramsci, cited on the same page: [hegemony is] “a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life” (1991:23). Thus, the Comaroffs render hegemony, in their definition, supported by this quote from Gramsci, as analogous to the ideology of the elites of a given society.
suggesting that these ideas, and ways of knowing recreate existing relationships. Crehan revisits the original Gramsci:

One might say ‘ideology’ here, but on condition that the word is used in its heighest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify. – (Gramsci 1971:328, quoted in Crehan 2002:173-174).

Crehan places the quote used to bolster the Comaroff’s definition, and notes that preceding the Comaroffs’ excerpt, and following it, are statements from Gramsci: “Here, Gramsci is indeed talking about the realm of ideas and beliefs, but he is talking about it, as the Comaroffs themselves note, in the specific context of a discussion of ideology, and, as far as I know, Gramsci never uses ideology as a synonym for hegemony” (Crehan 2002:174). Although the Comaroffs’ definition is appealing, because it seems to accord with the Marx/Engels conception and because it seems to be supported by the work of Williams, we see that Crehan has identified a misconception at the core of the Comaroffs’ work.

To return to Williams: In his discussion of hegemony, he claims two advantages to the concept: “First, its forms of domination and subordination correspond much more closely to the normal processes of social organization and control in developed societies than the more familiar projections from the idea of a ruling class” (Williams 1977:110). The second advantage is that “there is a whole different way of seeing cultural activity, both as tradition and as practice” (1977:111). Later, in that section, Williams says
“Cultural work and activity are not now, in any ordinary sense, a superstructure… because cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than superstructural expressions – reflections, mediations, or typifications – of a formed social and economic structure” (Williams 1977:111). Williams is attempting to differentiate between culture, with a capital C, in the sense of ideas, beliefs and values, in other words, ideology, and hegemony, which he contends is more pervasive than ideology but which he maintains is still an ideational construct. Hegemony is cultural, in the sense of ideology, but that’s not all it is. To call it superstructural is to miss the impact, the pervasiveness of hegemonic practice throughout a society. Is a legal system superstructural? Is an economic system? While both contain the use of ideology as a historical rationale, neither occupies the status of a purely ideological element of society. Either can be used as a tool for reinforcing power relationships and exist at multiple layers of society. Attempts to differentiate between superstructural culture and hegemony and the power relationships institutionalized in a society are, at best, arbitrary.

Kurtz, as I mentioned toward the beginning of this document, has contended that the anthropological differentiation between culture and hegemony is largely attributable to the influence of Williams (Kurtz 1996:115). Kurtz goes so far as to say that Williams does not accurately interpret Gramsci and that most anthropologists incorrectly assume that Williams is the authority on hegemony, and either willfully or, through ignorance, downplaying Gramsci’s contribution to the concept. Nevertheless, Williams’ work is widely acknowledged as a useful elaboration on the concept.

Crehan also supports this contention, rhetorically considering the popularity of Williams’ work despite the obvious narrow intent of Williams (to explore Marxism via
Gramsci and its role in analyzing literature). Crehan advances a few potential explanations, including the idea that people cite Williams (and, by extension, the Comaroffs) because “it offers a relatively brief and clear summary account of hegemony that saves us the labor of engaging with the complexities of the prison notebook in any serious way” (2002:174-175) despite flaws in that interpretation. Because, alternatively, Williams ties Gramsci to the culture concept, which is, of course, appealing to cultural anthropologists, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that Williams does not make explicit the divergence between his narrow use of Gramsci’s work as an adjunct to his interpretations of culture in the literary sense with the larger, more anthropological sense of the word culture (Crehan 2002:175-176). Crehan’s primary objection to Williams and his followers seems to be that Williams, intentionally or unintentionally, divorces culture from considerations of material, economic forces, which Gramsci does not do in the Prison Notebooks.

Kurtz does cite other researchers who have attempted to explain Gramsci’s work, (all cited in Kurtz 1996:111-115) including: those who attempted to divide the concept of hegemony into different kinds of hegemony (Adamson 1980, Femia 1988) which necessarily implies that hegemony does not correlate with dominance and, thus reduces hegemony to a recapitulation of pluralism, a la Dahl 1989, who has been an ardent proponent of pluralism as a balancing force in American politics since the middle of the 20th century); those who divide social formations into different aspects (Bocock 1986), like the economic, the state, and civil society, for the purpose of creating a “baseline for understanding the role of human agency in hegemony” (Kurtz 1996:112) which seems to be an update of C. Wright Mills work on power elites; those who attempt to explain that
hegemony is ideology (Hamilton 1986), which, I hope I have demonstrated, is not the case; those who subsume consciousness within ideology (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991 for one example), which oversimplifies the discussion and reduces opportunities for human agency; and, those who attempt to assert that consciousness must be raised in order to mobilize ideological resistance (Femia 1988, G. Williams 1960), which resumes a chicken and egg debate that has existed within revolutionary movements at least since the time of Lenin. All of these researchers have attempted to interpret Gramsci and the extent to which any have been successful is open to some debate. Kurtz contends that they stand in contrast to the Raymond Williams version of hegemony and, further, to Kurtz’s own claims to a more authentic interpretation of Gramsci.

Laura Nader’s (1997) use of ideas of hegemony appears to agree generally with the working definitions I have discussed. Lest we move too far away from the ultimate objective of this work, however, an example of the concept actually put into action as a way of guiding research (from Nader) may be instructive here:

Over a period of 40 years working in a number of different sites, I came to appreciate why anthropologists underestimate the political and economic use of legal ideologies in the construction or deconstruction of culture writ large… Research among the mountain Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico, from 1957 to 1969 first led me to distinguish harmony from harmony ideology and then to interpret the use of the harmony law model as a tool of pacification at first contact with Europe. Nader 1997:712.

This quote introduces an exploration of hegemonic power in the form of an ideology made a part of an institutional culture, in this case, the courts. Even the desirability of the manifestation of certain emotions is a byproduct of a dominant force that influences real processes at multiple layers in a society. In this case, institutional processes manifest ideologies. The institutional processes result in the sculpture of new ideological
processes related to assumptions about how those processes work and the system reproduces itself.

The careful analysis that Crehan brings to the discussion of Gramsci render her interpretation of hegeemony, from the anthropological standpoint, more useful and I will quote her at some length: “Hegemony in the prison notebooks, I would suggest, is an approach to the question of power that in its exploration of empirical realities – how power is lived in particular times and places – refuses to privilege either ideas or material realities, seeing these as always entangled, always interacting with each other. It is a concept, that is, that rejects any simple base-superstructure hierarchy. I would argue that it is precisely this rejection that makes hegemony such a potentially fruitful way of approaching issues of power” (Crehan 2002:200). Crehan is suggesting something not dissimilar to Nader, that the economic forces in a society can have a deterministic effect on the society without being static. In fact, the interrelationship of changing economic forces as well as changing ideological forces creates a continuous interrelationship rather than two distinct features of a cultural system that could be understood as discrete components.

Researchers like Nader or the Comaroffs or Smith or Kurtz or Crehan have all attempted to advance the concept as an anthropological one. Smith describes the impact of anthropological interpretations of hegeemony:

Studies such as these bring us from an older anthropological notion of culture to a newer one in which our understanding of the forms of power specific to a social formation effectively reconstitute the way in which anthropologists can use the notion of culture as the salient means for recognizing differences between people and then interpreting those differences… The concept of hegeemony helps us see that if collectives
become self-conscious in terms of distinct cultures, this is the result of quite specific historical practices. - Smith 2004:223

Smith contends that hegemony needs to be studied in terms of “two different currents of time and two different scales of space” (2004:224). Time appears as a concept in hegemony in the way that hegemony shapes our past, the way that we situate ourselves socially, as a result of “selective social memory” (ibid.). Time is also relevant because hegemony sculpts our future, too, limiting discourse and structuring the common sense that we use to make choices. The spatial issues involve questions of scale: on one level, Gramsci focused on the state and its ability to create a “commanding historic bloc” (ibid.); on another, alliances that occur across groups are relevant because Smith believed that Gramsci had a “concern with how the multiple interests of hitherto fragmented experiences might come together into a collective will” (ibid.). This combination of currents and scales shows the parameters of effect for hegemony.

For example, within the context of Hillsborough County politics, the scales of time appear in discussions of development and taxation. Hillsborough County, like many counties in Florida, has been reluctant to submit to a reduction in real estate development (and what is commonly called growth) or an increase in taxation because, the hegemonic ideology tells us, both are essential to the continued economic good fortunes of the area. Past policy decisions regarding taxation and growth have created a sense of precedence that precludes opening present and future discussions of such matters. Newspaper editors simultaneously decry the miserable state of public spending while announcing that it would be political suicide for a candidate to announce that they were going to raise taxes or significantly curtail growth. Along the spatial dimension, we see social formations
that seemingly defy easy categorization come into alliance on these subjects. Continuing our example of growth and taxation, a vast coalition of allies reinforces positions related to these topics. Developers and builders protest when impact fees are discussed before city or county legislative bodies. Impact fees are a kind of tax targeting newly built homes in order to pay for the municipal or county infrastructure necessary to support them. Despite the fact that taxpayers are, effectively, subsidizing the construction of new homes (by providing them with sewerage, sanitation, police protection, new schools, fire departments, and so forth), city and county legislators behaved in a manner that suggested that they believed that impact fees would be an unfair, market-stifling tax on growth, and growth is sacrosanct. Homeowners and long-term residents resist the idea of new taxes and objected to the idea of being charged extra on a new home due to municipal or county impact fees (which would, naturally if not justifiably, be passed on from the builder to the consumer). And, as a result, multiple groups find themselves in alliance, not strictly speaking because their practical interests are represented in their behavior, but because the hegemonic use of an ideology of unfettered growth and retarded taxation has become suffused throughout the community. This coalition of interests, rational or otherwise, is the spatial dimension of hegemony – the commanding historical bloc that cuts across social and cultural boundaries.

Kurtz looks at the concept of hegemonic culturation, a political process that relies on “ideas of hegemony and culture to provide an alternative explanation to coercion for political economic processes” (Kurtz 2001:129). Relying on his earlier statements regarding intellectual and moral leadership from a Gramscian perspective, Kurtz suggests that leaders in these areas can either maintain a system or create an opportunity for
change to take place, without the cost of direct coercion. In other words, “hegemonic
culturation refers to the changes induced by a political community’s leadership in the
perception and understanding of their subjects regarding why they should do something,
such as work more” (Kurtz 2001:130). This is a useful concept for addressing the
process through which hegemony actually makes changes in the cultural landscape. It is
my contention that this is a very useful concept for exploring the possibilities for change
from an existing hegemonic state into some other formation. A form of triangulation that
seems to concur with Kurtz’s interpretation comes from Sklair (1997), who contends that
there is a “transnational capitalist class” that proselytizes on behalf of capitalism the
world over. Although Sklair is not an anthropologist, identifying members of the
hegemonic formation that is undertaking hegemonic culturation is one way for
anthropologists to address this power relationship and initiate resistance, an assertion
with which I think Kurtz might agree.

Smith concludes his brief treatment of hegemony with a discussion of
“Hegemony in a Neoliberal World” (2004:225-228). Smith suggests that a movement
away from a thorough critique of the economy has resulted in an academic world that
simply accepts concepts like market forces, consumption, and private ownership of
property. Smith argues that incorporating economic critique into a discussion of the
discourse employed by elites and their representatives would be a more holistic exercise
that would “reveal the specific dialectical processes by which ‘economic’ practices at a
particular historical moment effectively reconstitute what is understood as ‘culture’ or
‘civil society’” (Smith 2004:225). To this extent, hegemonic forces, as expressed by the
proselytizers, the academics, pundits, politicians, and, of course, the business class itself,
have sculpted and restricted debate around things like “the economy,” “culture,” and “civil society.” This conception of the process of hegemony is not dissimilar from Kurtz’s conception of hegemonic culturation, and, further confirms the relevance of Sklair’s discussion of the class of exponents that he calls the “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair 1997).

2.3.9 Hegemony:Defined

Hegemony is a term that has undergone several definitional changes over the years. From Gramsci’s reinterpretation of Croce’s *egemonia*, to Smith’s “offstage rumblings,” the term has persisted in scholarly work moving into the 21st century. While legitimate scholarly debate regarding its definition still persists, I would like to propose a working definition that incorporates some of the elements I have discussed:

*Hegemony* (n.) – a form of leadership and control within a society whereby leaders use their socio-structural control of language and interpretations of history to elicit complicity and assent to power relationships on their behalf from a subaltern population. Hegemony is not monolithic or crudely deterministic. Rather, it is a contested process that is advanced by agents of a particular socioeconomic system and resisted by various elements in a society.

This definition, which I believe is supported by the literature, eliminates some of the jargon associated with the concept (“historic bloc,” “organic intellectual”) and focuses instead on what the thing, hegemony, does. Crehan (2002) contends that Gramsci’s conception of culture involves how class is lived at different times and places (199). Since class is a function of the power relationships manifest in a society (200), hegemony gives us a useful concept enabling us to interpret the production and reproduction of those power relationships. Further, Crehan illuminates useful distinctions between Gramsci’s ideology and Gramsci’s hegemony. Unlike some earlier interpreters
of the concept (Williams, the Comaroffs), Crehan suggests that Gramsci’s conception of hegemony has never been synonymous with ideology. Hegemony deals with ideology, as I have argued, but only to the extent that ideology is employed to reproduce a given set of class interests. Again, Gramsci relied on the idea that ideologies were produced by every segment of society but only some ideologies became hegemonic, as power-holders produced them, maintained them, and reproduced them. Organic intellectuals create alternate interpretations of power relationships, generating alternate ideologies, which, themselves, may be equally flawed in terms of truth value, but create opportunities for change in power relationships. Consider the transition between the divine right of kings in Medieval Europe compared with the Rights of Man embodied in the successor Enlightenment era. While both time periods could be critiqued in terms of accuracy, the succession was possible because the ideological interpretation of human beings and their potentialities had been advanced by organic intellectuals, just as the class of bourgeoisie was attaining sufficient economic power to challenge the status quo. The outsiders ascend to hegemonic status and their ideology becomes the norm.

It is a mistake to interpret any discussion of hegemony as a discussion of conspiracy. There are conspiracies, of course. Watergate, for example, was an example of a conspiracy intended to maintain a grip on political power. However, power operates as a series of seemingly coincidental decisions made in seemingly isolated circumstances.

For example, consider the situation of two bureaucrats, one employed by a real estate development corporation, one employed by the municipal government. The life experiences of both people, even if they had never met (never went to the same schools, never attended the same church, never worked in the same places of business), might
move them toward a point of common interest. For example, one bureaucrat might move to ease real estate restrictions on the basis of a belief that deregulation and the free market may solve problems better than a strictly controlled, government regulated industry. The other may move in the same direction out of some sense of self-interest. Now, it is likely that both bureaucrats have been exposed to the same fonts of ideology (although, remember, they have not been exposed to identical fonts of ideology). They may both watch pro-business cable news channels but not the same one. However, it is far more likely that they are simply exposed at a more subtle level to a climate of ideology in the society.

This climatic ideology is hegemonic. There are fluctuations of ideology within the climate – for example, you might have situations where talk radio hosts may disagree with the status quo, as in the recent case where conservative stalwarts on talk radio revolted against the nominal candidate of the Republican Party; or, you might see a politician who votes against the incumbent party’s plank position, as in the case of John McCain’s reluctance to adopt aspects of his party’s official stance on illegal immigration. Still, the general tenor of the things that people say or believe generally runs in accord with the hegemonic ideology. Again, and this is important to understand, there need be no fact sheet, there may not be a party line, there probably is not a conspiracy, per se. What there are, instead, are an impromptu chorus of voices (without a conductor), all of whom are singing approximately similar songs.

Lest this analogy become too delirious, it should be pointed out that the significance and meaning of the term hegemony (or, for that matter, ideology) has been
so ambiguous at times during the last several decades that perhaps a metaphor may be useful.

Suffice it to say that hegemony’s greatest strength is the idea that control of a sociocultural system can be undertaken without direct coercion through its use. Hegemony allows a ruling elite to achieve and maintain ascendancy in such a system. Non-elites in a system are encouraged to believe that the way things are is simply the inevitable product of the best possible confluence of forces rather than the peculiar situation resulting from a long chain of historical decisions.

Consider the situation of Rose Ferlita, Mary Mulhern’s opponent in the County Commission race. Ferlita was, at the time of the race, considered a pillar of the community in Tampa. Her Rose Pharmacy was a landmark business on Nebraska Avenue, in an economically challenged neighborhood in central Tampa, providing prescriptions and over the counter pharmaceuticals to a desperately underserved community. Ferlita’s clientele supported her bid for the County Commission, just as they had supported her bid for City Council, in part because of their loyalty to Ferlita’s pharmacy and her visible presence as a minor philanthropist, by reputation helping the most needy get their prescriptions. Many residents of that community donated to her campaign, often in the form of five-dollar donations enabling Ferlita to claim that she doesn’t take money exclusively from the wealthy. I do not mean to cast aspersions on Ferlita – who would not be proud of the humble support they garnered from people who could not afford to give much? But this is exactly my point – regardless of the beliefs of Ferlita or her donors, or the other members of the power structure as a whole, her place within that neighborhood, in that power structure in that historical context, all gave
Ferlita a hegemonic advantage over Mulhern. Ferlita, in other words, drew on this long-standing support, confident that this traditionally Democratic constituency would vote her way.

Ferlita’s business was, of course, a by-product of the social support system that created opportunities for her success. Her family has been involved in Tampa politics for several generations. The family name graces statues and monuments in Ybor City’s Centennial Park, across the street from the location of the original Ferlita family bakery (now the Ybor City Museum), just a mile or two from Rose Pharmacy. That family, of course, made it possible for her to attend college and receive the training needed to open Rose Pharmacy. In other words, no matter what achievements that she can claim as specific, personal accomplishments, they are built on a foundation of socioeconomic advantages that other people in the community surrounding Rose Pharmacy did not share. However, the visibility of these monumental accomplishments creates a significant hegemonic advantage for Ferlita. They create ties to the community, they lay claim to the territory, they serve as a constant reminder of the good works of Rose Ferlita and her family.

Ferlita also employs the existing symbols that fit into the common narrative of pro-business, pro-“outsider” political activism. While Ferlita is very much an insider in terms of power, connection to the community, and personal economic resources, she can also claim to be an outsider by virtue of her gender, her chosen profession (most politicians are lawyers, not pharmacist/small business-owners). Her entrepreneurship is regarded as a strength in our society, rather than an indication of her complicity in an economic process that fails to benefit many of our society’s members.
Further, the economic forces at play in Central Florida politics do tend to encourage the same sorts of responses from politicians because we have been conditioned, for so long, to accept the current set of ideas as normal rather than by products of specific historical/economic forces. Consider the subject of growth, which is a recurring theme for Tampa politicians – why growth? What is it about continued expansion, or even carefully managed expansion of the region’s housing and population base that is such a commonplace among politicians. The history of the city is one of relentless return to the idea of expansion and growth. This may be a necessary component of successful cities in the 20th century but, on the other hand, it might be that the interests of economic expansion suit a comparatively narrow class of property owners, builders, and the owners of the means of production and that their interests are considered sacrosanct within the political arena.

Hegemonic formations do not imply domination of one sector by another in the sense of coercive power. The complex motivations of individual actors create situations of collaboration and resistance and the pluralities that can create the most powerful combination of forces are, effectively, the hegemonic group. This is not pluralism in the traditional sense (c.f., Dahl 1989) because at the root of pluralism is the assumption that the formation of coalitions of interests creates balance and opportunity. However, the socio-structural advantages of the hegemonic formation create opportunities for persistence that counter-hegemonic coalitions would find difficult to match.

On the contrary, the objective is not to establish a force that is simply the opposite of whatever the hegemonic coalition maintains. It must be clear that the identification of the opposite of the interests of the hegemonic formation is probably futile. Instead, the
purpose is to find and exploit fissures within the hegemonic formation, prying off enough of the members of the dominant hierarchy that they are capable of empowering (or at least reducing the resistance to) those that do not want to support the hegemony. It should be noted that, at times, the stickiest aspect of hegemonic formations is the difficulty for those who would challenge the status quo is in determining what is, in actuality, counter-hegemonic. For example, the army of erstwhile rebels who decry political correctness in speech may feel that they are, somehow, challenging the status quo and sticking it to the man. However, such protests often place the rebels at odds with other counter-hegemonic forces, like feminists or civil rights activists, rather than entrenched elites. In other words, hegemonic power and the process of challenging it require careful consideration and some strategic planning.

2.3.10 Ideology and Hegemony Operationalized
Little enough of this matters if it cannot be rendered as an explicit strategy for taking this concept and actually initiating social change. Briefly, my objective in undergoing this consideration of these concepts was to understand where the point of attack lay for resisting power structures. In the few following pages of this section, I will attempt to make clear what assumptions I have made, and suggest a few courses of action that I saw as available as a consequence of them.

Before I can say that, let me remind the reader that we do live in a society where control of economic resources does still have a commanding effect on the remainder of the social and political organization of the society. This has been documented to the point that it has very nearly become a truism. A wealthy capitalist has more life chances, more ways to influence the process, and more resources to make his desires manifest in
our system, from the most trivial to the most coercive, than a person like him in every way except for the capitalist’s ownership (or at least dominant control) over the means of production. If such a person wishes to subsidize an ad campaign, or buy a newspaper and a television station, they can have a far greater effect on the ideas (the ideologies) that are available for another person to experience within that cultural context. If, indeed, such a person can subsidize the candidacy of politicians who will do the capitalist’s bidding once elected, then the capitalist is capable of not simply influencing public opinion but is, in a real way, capable of directly manipulating the formal political structures that are employed by the society. This ideological dominance, manifest in both the explicit ideas as well as the unspoken inclinations of the politicians, the bureaucrats, the media outlets, and even the voting public represent the hegemony – the climatic ideology that seems to encompass the dominant set of opinions and ideas.

Ironically, this grim prospect, the ideological armor of this seemingly impregnable fortress is, in fact, the point of attack, one of the ways in which resistance can be mounted. Consider for a moment the curious relationship between Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and radical documentarian Michael Moore. Despite Murdoch’s grip on many of the fonts of ideology (owner of Fox News, the Fox broadcasting network, and countless other media outlets), Moore, for many years, occupied a position on Murdoch’s network, producing a television program called TV Nation (1996-1997) that can politely be described as very critical of power relationships and economic disparity in the United States. How did he get on TV? How did Moore manage to stay on the air? If we are to assume that the hegemonic bloc only exists to serve the needs of the power structure, such a blip would never have occurred on the
radar screen. No, the presence of counter-hegemonic ideology (in the form of Moore’s TV show) is evidence that, as Gramsci contended, hegemony is incomplete, that it is actually an amalgam of interests and belief systems – the bloc is partially composed of hard core economic conservatives, economically ambiguous religious conservatives, well-meaning liberals with stock portfolios, law-and-order conservatives who oppose gun control, and on and on. No hegemonic bloc can exist (for long) composed of only one set of ideology. History is littered with the remains of totalitarian governments who tried to do just that.

So, then, hegemony is incomplete, and there are opportunities for a diverse array of ideologies to present alternatives. While some alternatives are more palatable to the dominant power structure, alternatives are often welcomed as a way of preserving the overall coalition needed to preserve the hegemonic bloc. Indeed, capitalist economies are quick to co-opt new ideas (even critical ones!), in part because the new ideas represent new market opportunities. Consider the co-optation of peace-signs: originally seen as a marker for radical resistance, they have become a marketable logo, a reference to a relatively harmless lifestyle decision that can augment the retail price of a t-shirt or a poster.

Truly, there are prices to be paid for being too far outside the hegemonic bloc. One of the truly amazing things about hegemony as a handmaiden to power structures is that the set if ideas expressed in that kind of hegemonic coalition can refute or ignore ideas that are too far outside the accepted norms without recourse to violent (and, ultimately, ineffective) coercion. Consider health care. In the United States, even supporters of single-payer, Canadian-style health care plans are not sanguine about its
prospects for adoption, despite public opinion polls that seem to support the plan. Why? At least in part because the hegemonic ideology does not permit rational discussion of the subject as a part of a serious policy discussion. The subject is anathema. I will not even broach the subject of alternatives to our core economic system.

But there is wiggle room for ideologies of dissent. Alternate opinions are not entirely stifled and sometimes, a font of ideology (an individual politician, an interest group like a labor union, the editorial board of a newspaper) can accrue enough support to at least enter the political field and contest ground in the political arena.

My hope, with this project, was to find some toe hold of ideology that was still open for contest. My initial approach, outlined in the vignette at the beginning of the first chapter, was to get access to the set of ideas fueling a campaign and, through research and writing, create a message that the candidate could use to accrue enough supporters to disrupt the hegemonic bloc long enough to get her into office. I would do this by writing campaign literature and speeches, maintaining her website, and talking to voters through the canvass. Ultimately, the test would be to see if a veteran (if not incumbent) politician could be unseated by a comparative outsider without a massive allocation of resources, through the use of tempered ideology as a weapon. Because of our limited financial resources, we could not speak more loudly than our opponent. However, I hoped, a carefully chosen message, displayed in the appropriate venues, would compensate for some of the resource deficiencies of our campaign. In the event, things didn’t happen as expected, but there were lessons to be learned as the process wore on.
3 Setting

Figure 1: Stand Up Marys on the Platt Street Bridge

When I arrived in the supermarket parking lot, it was still dark. The grocery store was still closed. It was already warm, but not nearly as hot as it would be later in the day. The air was thick with humidity but a breeze was beginning to blow. From a block away, we could smell the river and the nearby bay.

It was the morning after the primary election. The night before, Rose Ferlita had soundly beaten her three Republican opponents. Mary Mulhern, unopposed in the primary, chose today to publicly launch her campaign.

Mulhern arrived moments after I did, with donuts, coffee, bumper stickers, t-shirts, and the campaign signs. In addition to the conventional 18” by 24” yard-signs, Mulhern had invested three thousand dollars on 20 life-sized corrugated plastic images of herself. From a distance, the full-color signs looked a lot like the real-life Mary Mulhern,
especially when she wore the same outfit, which, of course, she was wearing that morning. After a few minutes, the volunteers all wore light blue Mulhern campaign shirts. With the exception of Mary Mulhern, we were all carrying the life-sized cutouts. We began to walk in a line, to the bridge.

The Platt Street Bridge is one of the western gateways to downtown Tampa. Residents from stylish and upwardly mobile Hyde Park, affluent Palma Ceia, middle-/working-class South of Gandy (also known as SoG City to the residents), and very working-class Port Tampa cross the Hillsborough River here on the way to work. The bridge is one-way.

Residents from the eastern portions of the county cross the nearby, one-way Brorein Street bridge on their way to jobs in South Tampa. The Brorein Street Bridge feeds into the intersection at the western approach to the bridge. Many of these workers are employees of MacDill Airforce Base, which occupies the southern tip of the South Tampa peninsula. The eastern expanses of the county are not as well-to-do, on average, as South Tampa, so many of the people heading west represent members of the body of service workers, small business owners, and employees of the people heading east, toward downtown.

The bridge itself is a drawbridge, originally intended to provide access to downtown without impeding commercial and pleasure craft from accessing the river. During the early portion of the 20th century, the eastern shores of the river were lined with warehouses designed to be a conduit between rail traffic and ocean-going vessels. Now, the eastern shores are an amalgam of commercial and municipal facilities, including hotels, office buildings, The Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, the Tampa
Art Museum, and the Tampa Convention Center. The Platt Street Bridge’s eastern terminus dives beneath the Convention Center. However, the western approach to the bridge is abutted by minimal city “parks” (little more than sidewalks surrounded by some more or less manicured shrubs). Across the way from the bridge is a condominium complex and a grocery store (part of a regional chain). Nearby is the major regional trauma hospital, Tampa General. Expensive cars and obviously affluent joggers speed by. Affluence surrounds this old bridge.

The affluence does not extend to the homeless people under the bridge, who numbered about six to ten, sleeping on cardboard pallets on the bare concrete walkway beneath the bridge the morning we arrived. As we waved our signs, a slow stream of homeless people walked to this area under the bridge, which also serves as a focal point for community activists providing food to the needy.

Nor does the affluence extend to the rusty old bridge itself, which, according to a 2007 summary of the legislative funding priorities of the Florida State Legislature, needs over $13 million dollars worth of refurbishment (Office of Public Affairs 2007). It is unclear if the drawbridge capability of the structure is still functional, and the open metal grating structure of the lift-able roadway is disconcerting to a pedestrian (OK, me), due to the rust and the vibrations of passing automobiles.

We marched from the parking lot, across several lanes of traffic to the north side of the bridge, the nearest corner. One of our number stopped at the edge of the street and began placing “Mary” yard signs. Yard signs are one of the staples of political campaigns. They are signs made of cardboard or plastic that are designed to inexpensively advertise a candidate’s name and, if it’s pithy, the candidate’s campaign
Almost all political campaigns have yard signs and their assumed value is highlighted by the fact that Jim Davis, the Democratic candidate for Florida Governor during the election cycle covered by this ethnography, underwent a minor scandal when his campaign declined to produce yard signs. Democrats feared that this would be interpreted as a shortage of resources for the campaign, a fear that was not too far off the mark. But to return to the Platt Street Bridge, the rest of us proceeded to the bridge and began to cover the western approaches. There is, at the time of this writing, no pedestrian walkway across the roadway on the bridge. Pedestrians are nominally supposed to cross underneath the roadway on the river-side walkway hugging the piers of the bridge or on the other side of the intersecting street. However, law enforcement had limited access to this underpass in an effort to control the homeless population. So, leaving a small detachment of four or five campaign volunteers, on the north side of the bridge, we waited for a lull in the traffic and sprinted across, to the south, carrying the cut-out signs, collecting some stares from passing motorists.

The stand-ups, as we called the cut-out signs, were like enormous paper dolls. They were, as I previously mentioned, life-sized depictions of the candidate holding up one of her more conventional 18” by 24” yard signs. They were strengthened with strips of wooden one-by-two along the horizontal axis formed by the shoulder of the figure in the stand-up and the corner of the sign the stand-up appeared to hold. Mulhern’s sole paid campaign worker (and the worker’s boyfriend) had stayed up all night, adding the wooden reinforcement and gluing on Velcro strips, along the vertical axis of the stand-up, to make it possible to attach the stand-up to a six-foot-long two-by-two stake.
The stake could be driven into the ground, theoretically allowing Mulhern’s volunteers to array several stand-ups around actual, living and breathing campaign workers. In reality, the signs were far too good an air-foil for this purpose – even a light breeze could pull the stand-up off of the Velcro-ed stake and send it sailing into the street. Since campaign visibilities were conducted next to major thoroughfares, this constituted a real hazard.

We began to spread out along the approaches to the Platt Street Bridge, focusing most of our attention on the traffic intending to cross the bridge; in other words, the more affluent, South Tampa crowd. In a long, loose arrangement flanking the bridge, drivers would see an array of about ten stand-up “Marys.” Then, they would see a cluster of stand-up “Marys” on the north side of the bridge. And then, looking back to the south again, there was Mulhern. Drivers laughed and pointed as they saw the stand-ups. They honked and waved when they saw Mary herself.

We began waving at about 7:00am, intending to continue waving until 9:00am, to capture the morning rush hours. The purpose of sign waving is to excite interest in the campaign in passing commuters. Sign waving isn’t a difficult skill to learn, but it is, surprisingly, an actual skill. Traditional political sign-waving involves holding a conventional 18” by 24” yard sign in one hand and waving with the other hand. The awkward size and shape of the stand-up necessitates a slightly different method. Each stand-up depicts Mary Mulhern waving one hand and holding a yard sign. As a result, one did not necessarily need to wave an unoccupied arm while holding the sign. Further, the aerodynamic properties of the sign made holding it with one hand a challenge if there was any kind of breeze blowing. We made the “Marys” dance by turning and swaying
them this way and that. After a few campaign events, we would do more complicated choreography with the Marys, including synchronized “dancing” with the stand-ups, doing “the wave” (as in the football stadium classic), parading in circles, turning the signs this way and that, and other forms of coordinated movement. Some of us held the signs high above our heads, others (especially the smaller volunteers) kept the base of the sign at ground level, resting it on the ground and holding it with one hand so the other hand was free to wave at motorists. Smiling female campaign workers seemed to get more attention from motorists but this observation has not been subjected to any scientific verification.

After we had been out on the bridge for about an hour, the sun began to make a hazy appearance above us. To this point, the rising sun had been obscured by the bulk of the Convention Center on the eastern side of the river. Now, sun began to beat down on us and I was glad I had worn sunscreen and a hat as well as my sunglasses.

A moment later, we saw Mulhern’s opponent, Rose Ferlita, leaving the grocery store parking lot and crossing the street toward the bridge. She was accompanied by two or three of her campaign’s volunteers. All held yard signs supporting Ferlita. This was a traditional activity for Ferlita, who liked to publicly thank voters for turning out in her support by doing a sign-waving event on this particular corner. They occupied the northeastern corner of the intersection, farther west than the small detachment we had left on the north side of the bridge. They waved their signs and received a fair amount of attention. However, the stand-up “Marys” were tough to beat as an eye-catcher and, after waving at motorists for a few cycles of the traffic lights and making a brief cell phone call to an unknown number, Ferlita and her staffers left the bridge.
At that moment, many of us, myself included, believed that we could beat Ferlita. We had an exciting, funny, creative campaign and Ferlita did not. We were eye-catching, and witty and Ferlita was not. We stayed on the bridge for two hours and Ferlita was out for less than half an hour. Afterward, we were all elated and amused by having participated in this street theater.

As we began to leave our sign-waving posts and head back to the parking lot, we should have paid more attention to something that happened moments after Ferlita left the bridge. A City of Tampa Code Enforcement officer had begun taking our signs out of the ground. When challenged, he said that he was under standing orders to remove unattended yard signs posted on the right of way. Despite the fact that we were within ten yards of the posted yard signs, he told us that they could be removed by us or removed by him and thrown away. We removed the signs, putting them back in Mulhern’s car.
3.1 Geography

Figure 2: District One, the "Coastal District" (Board of County Commissioners Website)

District One, the district in which the initial political contest occurred, is the most geographically dispersed district in Hillsborough County. The other “neighborhood districts (Two, Three, and Four) comprise comparatively dense blocks, with a much greater internal volume to surface area ratio than District One. Often called the “Coastal District” by political insiders, District one consists of a winding strip of land that nowhere is more than ten miles from the sea. Imagine Hillsborough County as a person’s right hand, stretched toward you. The area along the right index finger, the thumb, and
part of the base of the thumb, are District One. The area is, like most of Florida, low-lying, with almost no significant topographical features.

From the standpoint of climate, the District is a humid wetland environment, paved over with countless miles of pavement. There are two seasons in Florida weather. Summertime temperatures in the 80’s or 90’s are not uncommon, worsened by near-saturation levels of humidity. Campaign season in Florida occurs during the annual Hurricane Season, with afternoon rain and potentially dangerous thunderstorms common occurrences. Florida winters are mild and pleasant and are a magnet for travelers and visitors the world over.

During Mulhern’s second campaign, for City Council, she ran city-wide against Shawn Harrison. The City of Tampa has a dispersed quality, including part of the District One coastal area but also including the central city as well as the protrusion of land in the northern portion of the county that is commonly called New Tampa.
3.2 History

In his wonderful treatment of Tampa Florida and Hillsborough County politics, Robert Kerstein (2001), describes the Tampa Bay Area as one that has been predominantly controlled by a regime composed of economic elites, but this should not be regarded as a monolithic or permanently self-perpetuating group: “Those toward the top of Tampa’s economic ladder tended to wield political power disproportionately, both at the turn of the twentieth century and ninety years later. Yet Tampa’s elite was often split on a variety of issues, and different interests vied for political influence.” (Kerstein 2001:19). From the earliest eras of the city, an economic and social elite controlled governmental processes in the city, although not without challenge from newcomers, insurgent locals, and changing economic relationships. Although Kerstein approaches his discussion of Tampa Bay Area politics as a historian, there are numerous points that are relevant to the present work.

In the earliest era of local politics (1880-1920), the nascent city’s power relationships were defined by the interrelation of native white residents, primarily farmers and cattle ranchers, and newcomers, most notably the Plant Railroad system and its attendant personnel and resources in 1884 and the arrival of the cigar industry in the following year (Kerstein 2001:21). The railroad provided a connection between the city (then, a town) and the outside world that was speedier than marine transportation and more reliable than most overland transportation in Florida during that period. Prior to the construction of a rail spur, the nearest railhead was almost 100 miles north of Tampa, at
Cedar Key, where travelers would disembark and board a steamboat for the remainder of the voyage (2001:22).

Tampa’s status as a port, combined with the new railroad, made it an attractive destination for cigar manufacturers “who wanted to expand their businesses to a new location” (Kerstein 2001:25). Upon arrival, Spanish-born cigar industrialist Vincente Martinez Ybor purchased a plot of land with a local government subsidy. That plot of land would eventually become Ybor City, a company town for the cigar factories as well as an ethnic enclave for newcomer cigar factory workers (Kerstein 2001:25-26).

Workers came to the Bay Area from Cuba, Spain, Italy, and other areas, all intent on practicing their craft. Since many were did not initially become citizens, they did not participate in the electoral process at first (Kerstein 2001:48). However, rather than becoming a permanent oppressed underclass, the factory workers did well for themselves and their families and some features of their situation bear consideration. First, the talents of hand-made cigar workers are sufficiently rare and difficult to learn that the workers were able to organize in a craft-union during the heyday of the industry. Further, workers were able to form mutual aid societies benefiting the various national/ethnic/racial groups that came to work in the factories. These mutual aid societies provided social contact, education, entertainment, and many of the other things that citizens struggled to achieve through the electoral process during this period. In other words, their initial non-participation had more to do with their protected status as skilled workers and their self-sufficiency through the mutual aid system. Later, when the children and grandchildren of the initial wave of immigration began to participate in the broader society, they stood on a foundation composed of these factors. Oppression of
newcomers and union activists certainly existed during this early period and disturbing tales of race and labor related vigilantism haunt the history of the era, but the pressures of racism and anti-unionism served, in part, to galvanize the population to a measure of self-sufficiency that, perhaps, would not have occurred in the absence of such pressure. Amazingly, resistance to the status quo did exist: Socialist Party candidates succeeded in achieving hundreds of votes (29% of the total vote in Tampa in 1912, 17.4% in 1916) in this period of change (Kerstein 2001:43). Brave individuals like African American lawyer Zachariah D. Greene were excluded from the process through more or less open corruption; having secured enough signatures on his petition to make it to the ballot, Mr. Greene was simply told that his petition had been lost (2001:44). The fact that he even attempted to get on the ballot is marked evidence of the opportunities for change.

During subsequent years, the politics of the city and its surrounding county emphasized the expansion and development of the area. How to go about this expansion was a point of contention for the elites, “who were political rivals on some issses [but] coalesced on others during the years from 1920 to 1927” (Kerstein 2001:52). Governmental structure and the regulation of utilities were all topics under review during this transitional period. However, the oppression of minorities and the working classes continued. Tampa’s political scene continued to incorporate a White Municipal Party primary system, which effectively eliminated African American participation in the political process by controlling which candidates saw the opportunity to make it to the ballot.

However, this era saw increases in population as well as expansion of the geographic area covered by the boundaries of the metropolitan area. During the 1920’s,
the population of the city nearly doubled, increasing to just over 100,000 residents. Neighboring communities, like Temple Terrace, were founded in this period. Further, the city actually created more geography – promoter David P. Davis dredged two islands into existence and built residential developments on what would become known as the Davis Islands (Kerstein 2001:54). The Davis Islands are in the center of the area that would, eventually, become known as District One, the seat that Mary Mulhern would seek over 80 years later.

Governmental organization began to change during the 1920’s. Erstwhile reformers redefined the role of the branches of city government, defining City Council as a more explicitly legislative body but, importantly, putting them in charge of the executive branch as well: the mayor was more like a city manager, selected by the City Council or subject to Council oversight. Kerstein refers to this period of Tampa’s history as “commission government” (2001:56). The electoral process for seats on the City Council changed, too. Candidates prior to the commission government reforms were elected based on precinct. Reformers, including Tampa Morning Tribune publisher Wallace Stovall, argued that this was part of the problem, as ward politicians rewarded followers with municipal pork (2001:55-57). Consequently, during the 1920’s elections, City Councilmen (there were no women on the council) were selected at large, meaning that they had to run in the entire city. The results heavily favored the affluent neighborhoods of the city, and beggared the rest of the city in terms of representation: “of the fifteen men elected, thirteen lived in [two affluent wards]” (2001:57). Proponents of the council government scheme lauded the resistance of this new system to corruption, pointing out that it ousted trouble-makers and demagogues from the government. The
obvious accrual or maintenance of power among elites was not lost on critics of the time, who contended that more democratic representation was desired, not less (ibid.)

During this same period, aristocrats of the older Floridian families found some common cause with the newer money of the cigar factories. A strike in 1920, the same year as the adoption of the council government reforms, allowed elites to form alliances through mutual adversity (2001:63-64). This alliance was a shifting one, however, and, in 1927, the hegemonic domination of the political process (the mayor/commissioner system, with commissioners elected at large) was shaken by the incumbent mayor’s recommended reversion to a mayor/council system, one with district-elected representatives.

As evidence of the incomplete nature of hegemonic formations, one need look no farther than the shifting power blocks of the commission/council transition. Just as increases in ethnic/racial oppression increased (through both the White Municipal Party’s domination of the electoral process and the terrorism of the expanding Ku Klux Klan), which undoubtedly increased the level of oppression and control, Latin elites, the owners of the cigar factories and their attendant professional classes, peeled away from the commission/mayor form of government and strongly backed this return to more representational government (2001:69).

Kerstein describes the Depression and War years as a period of machine politics, corruption, and further reform (2001:72). Population growth slowed in the period prior to the war, to almost stagnant levels. The economic malaise that overcame the country impacted Florida as well. It should be remembered, however, that people in the midst of the crisis only see the problems of the moment, not the implications for history in the
long term, and elites, politicians, and labor and ethnic activists continued to muddle along through this period, struggling to continue to make something of the city of Tampa and its surrounding county. A 1929 dispute between Mayor D. B. McKay, champion of the return to mayor/council government (the City Council was known in this era as the Board of Representatives), and other political factions (including white supremacists) over the site of a new airport, illustrates the contentious nature of municipal politics.

Books could, indeed, be written about McKay, who was seminal in creating the City of Tampa. McKay was related by blood or marriage to numerous power brokers, including: old cattle barons like his father, John A. McKay; president’s of Tampa’s Board of Trade, like Dr. John P. Wall; gamblers and the criminal element, in the form of Dr. Wall’s son, the notorious Charlie Wall; and even the Latin elites that controlled the Cigar industry: McKay was married to the daughter of one of the factory owners. Combine all of this with the fact that McKay was the owner and publisher of the *Tampa Daily Times* newspaper and you have the makings of a Hearst-like figure in Tampa’s local political scene (2001:42-43). McKay served as mayor during two stretches, one ending in 1920, a second beginning in 1927 and ending in 1931. McKay helped form the White Municipal Party prior to the 1910 election, enabling Caucasians to consolidate their domination of Democratic Party activity in the city. His faction’s influence over the political scene waned in the 1930’s, but his involvement in city politics should not be underestimated.

The individual motives of the parties competing in the political arena in Tampa in the 1930’s are more or less available to scrutiny: some accused others of advocating one site or another because the city would have to purchase some of their land in order to build (2001:78-79). The city, acting under McKay’s leadership, floated bond issues to
pay for a new airport as a way of inducing an air carrier to continue service to the area (2001:78). Citizens mutinied at the capricious manner in which the site was ultimately chosen, initiating recall petitions against some on the elected officials involved. When national economic trends struck the area, citizens further expressed their displeasure with the lackluster performance of elected officials, accusing them of failing to take action to save the flagging local economy (2001:80). Political alliances, rivalries, and factions continued to eddy throughout the 1930’s and into the 1940’s. Perhaps the flux in terms of stable, elite governance was emblematic of the changing structural conditions underway at the time. Although alliances did form and political machines did assume a role in the operation of the political process, confusion as to the demands of the crisis may have prevented a single, coherent, hegemonic group from moving to the forefront.

Following the war, that pattern continued, for slightly different reasons. While the Depression Era’s confusion seemed to stem from the various factions advancing competing strategies for managing the city, the War and post-War era seemed to lack a dominant elite because of growth: growth both in terms of an expansion of the size and population of the city, but also in terms of the inclusiveness of the post-War polity. One candidate, Curtis Hixon, dominated the mayor’s office, successfully holding it from 1943 until his death in office in 1956. While Hixon initially campaigned on a platform of opposition to corruption and support of reforms that would restore the commission-style government, he sustained allegations of corruption from opponents in subsequent election cycles (Kerstein 2001:100-106). Hixon oversaw some of the reform efforts during this era – the city did readopt the at-large voting system to elect City Council/Board of Representative members. Additionally, this period saw the strengthening of the Mayor’s
office, granting him some additional influence on the execution of policy. Additionally, now the races for municipal office were nominally non-partisan. While this may have superficially been a paean to those who wanted to see an end to faction and party rancor, the effect was not to reduce their effect, but simply to make the factions and rancor more obscure to casual observers. Parties no longer designated candidates but candidates require political organizations for election, so political action groups formed, including the Better Government League and V.O.T.E. – the Voice of the Electorate. Though short-lived, these groups, composed primarily of business leaders and professionals did have some initial success (Kerstein 2001:103). Hixon drew support both from business sources as well as the African American community, an ironic asset considering Hixon was the winner of the White Municipal Party primary during his campaigns for the office (2001:104-105): he could not have been elected otherwise. Following the 1951 municipal elections, the White Municipal Party primary ceased to be a visible presence in Tampa politics (Kerstein 2001:118-119) but this was the result of increases in the status of outsiders (both outsiders to the community and community residents who were outsiders to the powerstructure) rather than because the White Municipal Party simply chose to suspend operations out of caprice.

During this era, second and third-generation Latins (actually Sicilians, Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians) living in Ybor City began to amass political power in their own right, supporting the County Commission campaign of Nick Nuccio, an Ybor City native, who would go on to be mayor following the Hixon Administration. Running on an anti-corruption platform (yes, another candidate running on such a platform), Nuccio named names and drew attention to specific acts of criminal behavior on the part of members of
the power structure (Kerstein 2001:105-106). Countercharges flew. The Tribune accused Nuccio of close relations with known criminals and other media figures offered unsupported allegations against him as well (ibid.). Other minorities, notably African Americans, were still subject to many of the limitations of the Jim Crow South. African American candidates received death threats when they attempted to run for office in 1951 and candidates that attempted to circumvent the White Municipal Party primary were criticized in the press (Kerstein 2001:118-119). While the White Municipal Party was effectively eliminated as a legal entity after the 1951 election cycle, the transition to at-large Board of Representatives election in 1945 just as effectively eliminated any immediate possibility of African American representation on the Board.

Outsiders intervened in Tampa politics during this period, with Estes Kefauver’s U.S. Senate Committee on Organized Crime visiting in 1950, resulting in allegations against the Police Chief, the state attorney, and the Sheriff. Eventually, the Sheriff was convicted of tax evasion charges in 1953, after several years of ducking accusations. Interestingly, it was a fracture in the business community that lead to the entrance of the Kefauver commission. Members of the Chamber of Commerce were initially leery of the prospect of a national oversight committee looking into Tampa affairs. However, individuals like Carl David Borein, the president of the Peninsular Telephone Company, advocated cooperation with the commission (2001:107) and the Chamber went on to approve on a vote of eight to one. The chamber followed the Kefauver commission’s recommendations with the formation of a Tampa-based Crime Commission, one side-effect of which was the formation of the political action group VOTE (mentioned above).
The 1950s were a period of continued geographic and population growth (Kerstein 2001:108-112). By 1950, almost 125,000 people lived in Tampa, which was about half of the county’s population as a whole. Many of those who did not live in the city lived in unincorporated areas immediately adjacent to the city limits. Beginning in the 1940’s, several powerful voices began to advocate the expansion of the city limits. Both newspapers, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Mayor’s office all supported annexation, to varying degrees, despite reluctance on the part of residents in the unincorporated areas and the region’s state legislative delegation. After some reverses, the deal was done (in 1953), causing a doubling of the population by 1960, as well as a dramatic increase in the physical size of the city.

Following another national trend toward urban renewal, Tampa/Hillsborough politicians and business leaders began to examine the redevelopment of the traditional African American area of the city of Tampa known as the Scrub (Kerstein 2001:115-118). Other impediments (the position of the Hillsborough River running through one axis of the city; the rights of downtown property owners) made redeveloping the Scrub a more appealing solution to the problem of rehabilitating the immediate area than tampering with those other issues. Initially, efforts were made to turn the Scrub into a non-residential redevelopment project, with an emphasis on eliminating the slum housing already in the area. However, pressure from the leadership at MacDill Field, the Air Force base at the southern tip of the city caused municipal leadership to reconsider, and, in 1954, Central Park Village, a housing project including approximately 500 units, was constructed atop the ruins of the Scrub. Years later, Central Park Village itself moved back to the center of a discussion about urban poverty and how best to manage the
downtown area, but in the 1950’s the assumption was that the creation of not-unsightly publicly subsidized housing would benefit the area on a number of levels.

With the death of Curtis Hixon shortly after his reelection in 1956, Nick Nuccio’s political career was resurgent. Attacking Hixon’s interim successor, J. L. Young, Jr., as one of the politicians who blocked successful economic growth and expansion, Nuccio allied himself with pro-growth, pro-business elements. While Young pointed out the fact that the alignment with pro-growth forces was a recent conversion of Nuccio’s attitude (for example, that Nuccio had not joined the Chamber of Commerce until he decided to run for Mayor), Nuccio’s accusations regarding Young and the old-style corruption of the political system had traction with voters. It is notable, from the perspective of this dissertation, that Young did not respond with an anti-growth message. Rather, his response to Nuccio’s allegations of obstructionism were that he, Young, was, in fact, the more pro-growth, pro-business candidate. It seems to have occurred to neither candidate that there was any other option. Nuccio defied the endorsements of the Tampa Tribune, winning a majority on the second ballot and narrowly defeating Young (Kerstein 2001:122-124), becoming Tampa’s first “Latin” mayor.

Nuccio was defeated on the second ballot during his run for reelection in 1959, by a University of Florida football star who ran a successful dairy operation, named Julian Lane. He, like Nuccio, and Young and, for that matter, Hixon, ran on a pro-growth platform that closely allied itself with commercial interests in the city, including the Chamber of Commerce. Kerstein notes that despite the differences between Nuccio and Lane, there were almost no real differences between them on the one issue that mattered to stakeholders in the power structure: growth (2001:125). Another similarity is that
both Nuccio and Lane attempted to court the African American vote. Nuccio relied on African American voters to tip the balance for them during their elections. Lane actually showed some willingness to accommodate the demands of civil rights activists during his administration. Nuccio won re-election in 1963 in part because he continued to accommodate some of the African American community’s concerns but, nothing like a permanent alliance formed as a consequence of these political maneuvers (Kerstein 2001: 126-128). In fact, one of the policy decisions so roundly supported by all the members of the power elite was to cause lasting damage to the African American community: Urban Renewal.

In 1958, Nuccio appointed members to head the area’s Urban Renewal Agency. The following year, the URA began the process of removing the more than 300 lower income families that lived on the street that would soon by replaced by a massive redevelopment construction project (2001:134-145). Since evictions occurred prior to finding new housing for the displaced residents, many were thrown on the housing market with little assistance. In 1963, only 21 of 106 displaced families had found residence elsewhere and eight of those families lived in what observers called substandard dwellings (ibid.). Nevertheless, the Federal government continued to extend grants and contractors continued to build the projects – notably the branches of interstate highway that would ultimately become known as Interstate 4 and Interstate 75 (later known as Interstate 275). Housing units were built only many years after the displaced residents were long gone (Kerstein 2001:140).

Development of the interstate and displacement of African American residents near the down-town area were not the only projects undertaken during this period. Ybor
City was also taken on as a redevelopment project (Kerstein 2001:141-145). Mayor Nuccio had declared the importance of turning Ybor into a New Orleans-style tourist destination during his first term in office, his successor, Mayor Lane agreed and the availability, during the early 1960’s, of Urban Renewal funds made it possible to enact the plan. The prospect of having a quaint, ethnic neighborhood adjacent to downtown was enormously appealing to business and politicians alike. Rather than dedicate resources to revitalizing the residents that still lived in the area, however, the project focused on removing residents and developing the business district as a tourist area. Despite enthusiastic support from the Tampa Times, the project stalled.

The end of Nuccio’s second term in office marked the beginning of the remarkable Mayoral career of Dick Greco, in 1967. However, little changed in terms of overall policy – the urban renewal projects of the Nuccio/Lane/Nuccio continued under Greco (as well as his successors). Also, little changed in terms of the inclusion of African Americans on the City Council or the County Commission: there were no African Americans on either board (Kerstein 2001:156-157). The main thing that changed during the period from 1967 to 1979 was the tremendous expansion of population living in unincorporated areas of Hillsborough County (2001:157). Suburban areas surrounding the city were flooded both by people leaving the urban core as well as some portion of the seemingly endless stream of newcomers to the state of Florida. Population outside the city limits grew much more quickly than inside the city. Though Tampa’s population actually dropped between 1960 and 1980, the population of the outlying area increased by almost 300,000 people. Within a generation, the population center of the County shifted to the west as eastern and southern portions of Hillsborough
African American population grew from 16.8% of the city’s population in 1960 to 23.4% of the population in 1980, supporting the contention that white flight accounted for some of the shift.

Continuing themes from previous administrations, Greco and his successor, William F. Poe, focused on accommodating business and professional communities. Powerful individuals with institutional affiliations began to have a more apparent role in local politics, including builder Jim Walter, TECO executive William C. MacInnes, and lawyer Chester Ferguson (Kerstein 2001:162-164). Perhaps not surprisingly, there were no African Americans among the most influential men of that era, nor were there any females. Neither women nor African Americans were represented in Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla, the nominal and traditional host of the Gasparilla festivities, either, during this period. As a parenthetical aside, you can see the Jose Gaspar, the barge which serves as the centerpiece of the Gasparilla festivities, in the background of the photo at the beginning of this section. African Americans sought but failed to attain public office during the 1970’s, just as they had failed to do in previous periods. In short, the demographic divergences of the period did not lead to dramatic improvements for traditionally oppressed classes, nor did it involve the creation of a new ruling elite.

In the 1980’s, Tampa continued its fascination with growth politics. However, some changes did occur during this period. For example, the first African American was elected to the City Council, the first in the 20th century (Kerstein 2001:189). Later in the decade, as a result of legal challenges by African Americans, the composition of the City Council was adjusted to be a combination of at-large and district seats. The County
Commission took similar measures and an African American was elected to the commission during this period.

One intriguing figure among area politicicos was Mayor Bob Martinez, who was William F. Poe’s successor in 1979. Martinez was a former union leader in the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association and a Democrat. However, perhaps sensing the political wind shifting with the rise of Ronald Reagan as a political presence at the national level, Martinez switched parties shortly after assuming office (Kerstein 2001:191). Since City elections are nominally non-partisan, it is difficult to say what party some office holders would have been, but it is significant to note the domination of the Democratic Party over the Bay Area’s political scene. In 1983, Martinez pledged to help re-elect President Reagan, a pledge rewarded by his inclusion as a speaker during the Republican National Convention in 1984. In 1986, Martinez resigned from office in a successful bid for the Governor’s mansion.

The 1980s mark an era of change and growth in Tampa’s business community. Newcomers to the business community joined the Chamber of Commerce and supported their pro-growth business ambitions. Older members of the business elite incorporated the new money, forming partnerships and making more money, and Mayor Martinez worked to facilitate the economic growth of the business sector. While some neighborhoods began to complain about the growth in their vicinity, Kerstein (2001:196) notes little organized resistance to the pro-business growth.

A new trend emerged in the relationship between the city and the county. As the population growth of the county outstripped the growth of the city, the county, through the Board of County Commissioners, began to take a more active role in determining
policy for the region. Some of the friction came from the Mayor’s office. Martinez contended that residents of the city were, essentially, being forced to pay for municipal infrastructure as well as subsidizing the infrastructure of the unincorporated county (Kerstein201:214). Ironically for the pro-business (and therefore pro-growth) Martinez, the real bone of contention was the willingness of the County Commission to allow growth to outstrip the development of infrastructure in the outlying areas. During this period, Jan Platt, a county commissioner known for her growth-control political positions (later to be known as “Commissioner No” by Bay Area political observers) developed a reputation, along with Commissioner Fran Davin, for dissenting from the majority on the Board of County Commissioners as it approved development after development. Some of the approvals were the result of bribes collected by the approving members of the Commission. In 1983, one Commissioner plead guilty, leading to two other commissioners being arrested and convicted for receiving bribes from developers (Kerstein 2001:216).

Democratic governor Bob Graham appointed three replacement commissioners, who tried to support a new program of “healthy growth” (Kerstein 2001:217-218). Commissioners increased expenditures on infrastructure development in an effort to offset the runaway growth that had begun during the population boom of the 1970’s. To pay for this growth, Commissioners applied a four-cent gasoline tax. The Commission also instituted impact fees on new construction, in an effort to offset transportation costs and parks. This was the first time that the Board of County Commissioners had ever levied impact fees and their institution garnered resistance on the part of homebuilders as well as the owners of gas stations. Nevertheless, the Commission did make a very
respectable effort to control growth. Growth was not limited, however, in the sense of pinning the approval of new developments to the presence of existing infrastructure. Rather, the Commission focused on “allowing growth where people wanted to live and improving government services” (Kerstein 2001:218) to those areas as well as existing areas.

After Martinez left for Tallahassee, the Chairwoman of the City Council, Sandy Freedman, assumed the office of the Mayor on an interim basis until the election the following Spring. Freedman had intended to run for the Mayor’s office and had been fundraising for some time when she took office upon the resignation of Martinez. Although Freedman was funded by many of the business interests that had backed Martinez during his campaigns (Kerstein 2001:222), this period does represent a departure from the status quo on a number of fronts. During this period, the business community, that had been a coherent, stable core to political organization since, at least, the 1920’s, began to fragment. Older pillars of the business community began to move out of the area or form conglomerates with much larger corporate entities. New players arrived in the area, typically “back office subsidiaries” that handled some portion of the business of a much larger corporate group (Kerstein 2001:222-225). But, as Kerstein suggests just because “there was no cohesive business sector for Freedman to interact with, she was by no means averse to public support of development efforts” (2001:224). During the period from 1986 to when she left office in 1995, numerous public investment projects were initiated, including the Florida Aquarium and the building that would, eventually, become known, confusingly, as the St. Pete Times Forum. Also during this
period, the contentious development of the downtown Convention Center was re-started, after flagging during Mayor Martinez’s administration.

During the 1990’s, Freedman was at the helm during a number of incidents that indicated the changing status of African Americans and other minorities in the city (Kerstein 2001:239-251). In a relatively brief period of time, Freedman: attempted to increase the number of minority contractors hired by the city; tried to force Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla to accept non-white members (and ultimately made Gasparilla a much more inclusive event); and, became entangled in an effort to bring a former slave ship to the area’s Aquarium as a piracy-themed museum (an account of which is detailed in Yelvington 2002). In the end, these events are emblematic of an increase in the involvement of African Americans and other minorities in the governance of the city.

At the county level, changes were also underway. In 1985, the Board of County Commissioners grew from five to seven members, with three elected at-large and four elected from regions of the county (the current arrangement). Some of the healthy growth initiatives of the previous administration were undercut or modified by the new Board. During this period, the Board bowed to development interests in the creation of the new I-75 corridor, a north-south road that connected I-75 to the north of the county with the span in the counties south of Hillsborough, thus rendering dozens of miles of relatively undeveloped real estate valuable property (2001:253-255). However, one feature of the 1983-1985 Commission had been responsible growth – growth that paid for itself through impact fees. With the continued explosion of growth in the undeveloped portions of the county, impact fees were once again considered by the Commission, only to be roundly defeated by the Builders Association of Greater Tampa, a lobbying group,
in 1988 (2001:255). Although the impact fees were defeated, this was not the political environment of times past in Hillsborough County. Anti-growth candidates like Phyllis Busansky attained office and allied with Jan Platt in support of planned-growth. In 1990, the slow-growth faction on the county increased to a majority, including Busansky, Platt, and two newcomers: Ed Turanchik (who held the District One seat that would, eventually, be sought by Mary Mulhern) and Sylvia Rodriguez Kimbell. Resistance to the externality costs of the development industry was taking hold in the political consciousness of area voters (2001:256).

However, as Kerstein points out, “[electoral] coalitions… are not the same as governing coalitions” (2001:257). Despite the electoral trend toward healthy growth or slow-growth, the new County Commission lacked the authoritarian stamp that characterized earlier incarnations of the Board. If there was an authority figure in county government, it was County Administrator Fred Karl, who did not always agree with the Commission’s policy positions. Consequently, when crises related to the implementation of environmental regulation emerged, dissent among the County Administrator and the Board. Even during the period composed of the avowed anti-growth Commissioners (Platt, Busansky, Turanchik, and Kimbell), the Board was not exactly anti-growth. The ordinarily laconic Kerstein derides this period as “liberal growth politics” (2001:260).

Following Freedman’s departure from City Hall, she was succeeded by none other than Dick Greco. Greco, who had been Mayor during the late 60’s and early 70’s, returned to the Mayor’s office, easily beating Jan “Commissioner No” Platt. Backed heavily by members of the Chamber of Commerce and endorsed by both the Tampa Tribune and the St. Petersburg Times, Greco ran on the premise that he was well suited
for moving the city forward, whatever that meant (Kerstein 2001:272-274); he was unopposed when he ran for reelection in 1999. After the brief hiccup of the late 80’s, early 90’s, Tampa was back in business as a pro-growth operation. Greco worked to annex the New Tampa region, the first annexation to the city in many years, primarily by bypassing existing restrictions on growth and making exceptions to permit the continued development of the region (2001:276). The city invested in renovations of historic buildings in Ybor City and Tampa Heights and also provided public funds to develop new facilities, like Centro Ybor, an entertainment complex in the center of Ybor City’s 7th Avenue business district.

In the years following, some things changed in both city and county government, in terms of personnel, but the general pro-growth trend continued. The addition of colorful characters, like Ronda Storms, to the Board (in 1998) altered some aspects of the Commission, but the majority of Commissioners, as the Commission moved into the period of this research were Democratic. Kathy Castor, who held the seat that Mulhern would seek in 2006 had been elected in 2002. Pat Frank and Jan Platt were still members of the board, although they both retired from the Board in 2004. Reverend Tom Scott, representing the historically African American District Three, is a Democrat, but he often found himself allied with the more socially conservative members of the Board, like Mark Sharp and Ronda Storms. In 2004, due to the retirement of Frank and Platt, the Commission took a dramatic turn to the right, as two pro-development conservatives joined the three already on the Board, shifting the balance of power considerably. Since Commissioner Scott was considered an ally of the conservatives on social issues,
Castor’s lone dissenting vote often was the only voice objecting in a series of 6-1 decisions.

Castor’s announcement, at the end of 2005, that she was seeking a seat in the United States Congress was one of the inspirations for Mulhern to enter the race, in part because Mulhern saw the contentious tone on the board as an impediment to conducting business. While Mulhern had no illusions about the general tone of conservatism on the Commission, two things held out hope for her: One, she felt that she was, first and foremost, a hard worker and a person who would not allow personal rancor to interfere with her ability to conduct the business of the county. Two, she thought that at least one of the Democrats who were, like her, seeking seats on the County Commission, would attain office, meaning that she would not, like Castor, be a minority vote. Storms was leaving the Board but she was replaced by an avowed conservative named Al Higginbotham who bested Democrat Lisa Rodriguez. Jim Norman, another of the conservative members of the board, was up for reelection and was challenged by two opponents: colorful strip-club owner and entrepreneur Joe Redner, who ran as a Democrat; and, Yamel Arronte, who was running with no party affiliation. Redner’s background and the distraction of the Arronte campaign resulted in a relatively easy win for Norman. In the end, the only Democrat to make it onto the Board was pro-business Democrat Kevin White, who survived a minor scandal regarding his use of campaign funds to purchase clothing in his bid to succeed Reverend Scott as the representative from district 3. In the end, the only Democrat to make it onto the board was White. Had Mulhern successfully attained office, it is arguable that her votes would have been
exactly as isolated as Commissioner Kathy Castor was during the latter portion of her tenure in office.

On the municipal level, things turned out somewhat differently. Following Grecco’s term, former Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Pam Iorio sought and attained the Mayor’s office. Iorio had served on the County Commission in 1985, the youngest person ever to do so. During her term in the Supervisor’s office, she developed a reputation for steady efficiency that was an important part of her successful campaign for Mayor. She had acquired this reputation in part because of the flawless efficiency of the 2000 election in Hillsborough County even as other counties in Florida struggled. She was reelected handily in 2007. In fact the Mayoral race was considered such a foregone conclusion that many suggested that there would actually be a reduction in voter turnout, despite the offices up for grabs on the remainder of the ballot.

While Commission politics began to alter somewhat on the arrival of Ronda Storms, City Council politics remained largely the pattern of, as Kerstein describes it, “pro-growth liberalism” (2001:260). The current line-up of the Council consists of three at large and four district seats. Unlike the County Commission, the seat numbers are reversed: on the Commission, the lower numbers are district seats; on the City Council, the higher numbers are district seats. In the first seat is Gwen Miller, a long-time member of the City Council who initially rose to the body by way of District 5, a district that closely overlaps the District 3 County Commission seat. Term limits prevented her from continuing to run from District 5, so she ran for an at-large seat and garnered the support of enough residents of the whole city to be reelected in that capacity. Councilwoman Miller is the Chair of the Council. The second seat on the council
belongs to Mulhern, who was elected to that body in 2007. She replaced Rose Ferlita, who held the seat until she switched to the County Commission race that was Mulhern’s objective in 2006. In the interim between Ferlita and Mulhern, a temporary councilman held the seat, but he was prevented from running for the post in 2007 and, therefore, constituted no challenge to Mulhern. In the third City Council seat is Linda Saul-Sena, who has held three terms in office, two non-consecutive terms in the third seat, along with an interim term in the District 4 (South Tampa) seat. Although she presently holds an at-large seat, her power base is in South Tampa. That South Tampa seat once held by Saul-Sena is presently held by John Dingfelder, a lawyer who attained the seat in 2003. In 2007, he was challenged by a candidate closely associated with business and construction interests, whom he narrowly defeated. In that race, the incumbent, Dingfelder, was forced to spend more than three times as much money as he had spent in initially getting into office, because of the financial resources mustered by his opponent. In seat five is Reverend Scott, late of the County Commission. In seat six, representing traditionally Latino West Tampa is Charlie Miranda, often called the Mayor of West Tampa. Miranda took the seat vacated by the retirement of Mary Alvarez. In seat seven, Shawn Harrison’s former position on the board, is Joseph Caetano, a business owner from New Tampa who is a former United States Marine.

What conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis of the political history of Tampa and Hillsborough County? First, that it is difficult to extract the larger trends in terms of power, wealth, and racial/ethnic identity from the more mundane, specific events that occur. The creation of a new airport for the city in the 1930’s may seem a small thing, perhaps an inevitable thing considering the ubiquity of the aircraft today, but, at the
time, it served as an arena in which political power was enacted, a place where the members of the political field could engage one another (Kurtz 2001:106). Each issue entailed the formation of new alliances, new conflicts, and the results of each encounter often provided temporary advantage to one side or another. True, those that controlled the wealth had a colossal edge, and they exploited the outsider status of Latinos and African Americans in order to retain dominance over the system, but factions rose and fell.

This leads us to another observation worth noting: Hegemony never became monolithic. Just as the political elites would secure some further advantage in controlling ethnic/racial minorities and the proletarian classes, some portion of the elite class would cleave away from the hegemonic formation. The motives for such movements are open to some speculation. When Mayor D.B. McKay began advocating for a return to mayor/council (as opposed to mayor/commission) government, he did so at a time when elites controlled economic and political institutions and when the Ku Klux Klan enforced power relationships with terrorism. His agency in that event attacked a fissure in the hegemonic block. Perhaps he did so out of a desire for more personal power, more advantage in advancing his own agenda, but the result of his break with other elites is that new opportunities for political participation emerged, and new factions of elites were created, factions which included previous outsiders, like the Latino cigar factory owners. In a later era, the incipient racism of the system was confronted, through lawsuits in the 1980’s brought by African American activists (effectively an elite or vanguard) contesting the all-at-large system that had prevented the participation at the City Council
or County Commission level, and bringing new elite factions into play while simultaneously creating systemic opportunities for the previously disenfranchised.

Another conclusion relates to the historical relationship of the situation to the Gramscian discussion of the “Southern Question” (Forgacs 1988:171-185). Gramsci wondered at the divisions between the categories of non-bourgeoisie members of society. How does one reduce the differences that are evident between peasant farmers and the industrial proletariat? Similarly, one wonders at the degree to which, say, office workers, industrial wage earners, and rural farm populations can be expected to share a uniform conception what is an adequate course of action. The history of Tampa politics shows that coalitions of workers from various walks of life have been able to set aside differences to consolidate political power. Typically, however, this has occurred during periods where the hegemonic bloc is, itself, struggling to realign itself to some new configuration of systemic power. At one level, for example, the political ascendance of Nick Nuccio could be seen as a direct thrust to the status quo, but, as we have discussed, his ascent could just as easily be seen as a momentary interruption of the realigning political forces. Indeed, Nuccio’s days of challenging the status quo ended prior to his tenure as mayor – Nuccio positioned himself as a champion of the pro-growth, pro-business policies of the hegemonic bloc. Change did occur under Nuccio, but the change did little to alter the overarching themes of the hegemonic bloc. Rather, these changes had more to do with the inclusion of more apparent ethnic and racial diversity within the bloc.
In short, the mixture of history, economic forces, and the structural and ideological fissures within the hegemony have created opportunities for incremental political and social change.
3.3 Demographics

Hillsborough County, Florida, is a populous county on the west coast of one of the most populous states in the United States. Approximately 18,000,000 people live in Florida, and 1,150,000 of them live in the county, according to the 2006 estimates of the United States Census. Only about a third of the total county’s population lives in the city limits of Tampa, the largest metropolitan area, according to the 2003 estimates of the Census (the most recent for the area). District One, the district Mulhern sought to represent in her County Commission bid, is composed of about 314,000 people, about the same as the City of Tampa.

While Commission District One overlaps the city of Tampa, they are not interchangeable. One remarkable feature of Florida politics is the number of people who don’t live in metropolitan areas. They live in unincorporated areas with representation, politically, only at the county, state, and national levels. Some tension exists between those that live in those unincorporated areas and those that live within the city limits, as we have seen in our treatment of the history of the area. Traditionally, the gravitational center of the county was within the city of Tampa. Most of the outlying areas were farm land or undeveloped countryside. However, the boom in housing prices and the growth of existing outlying communities (in part subsidized by tax dollars through the actions of the pro-growth policies of the Board of County Commissioners) has shifted the axis farther east.
The city of Tampa is less affluent in terms of median household income than the surrounding county. Median income according to the United States Census for 2000 projections was about $34,415 in the city and, according to 2006 projections, the county’s median income was about $40,663. Since the county necessarily includes the city, this means the disparity is even greater than it might initially seem. Mulhern’s district in the Commission race was regarded as a comparatively affluent one, consisting of coastal properties that are often regarded as more desirable than ones in older, inner-city locations. The United States Census for that period indicates that of the 76 census tracts within district one, 25 have a median household income in excess of the county median. In comparison with the city of Tampa, the district fares somewhat better, with 51 of the census tracts, scoring higher than the median for the city.

In terms of race and ethnicity, about a quarter of the residents of the city are African American and approximately 20% are of Hispanic ethnicity. The county is about 22% Hispanic, but only 16.5% African American. County Commission District One overlaps some of the unincorporated county’s Latino population in the western reaches of Hillsborough but includes comparatively few African American voters. Obviously, the at-large election for City Council included all of the city’s African American voters. Other racial categories, as collected by the United States Census, are of marginal note.
3.4 Political Biographies

3.4.1 Mary Mulhern
Mary Mulhern is not native to the city of Tampa, Hillsborough County, or even the state of Florida. She was born in 1959 and is originally from Michigan. Her father was in the auto industry in that state, and Mary worked, for a time, as an assembly-line worker in an auto plant, while she was in college (Tampa City Council Website, personal interviews).

She graduated from the University of Michigan in 1982 and, in 1985, took a job as Arts Administrator at the Art Institute of Chicago. After 13 years, Mulhern left that position and started a private consulting firm, called Mulhern Fine Arts Management, which she ran from 1998 to 2002. During this period, she moved to the Tampa Bay Area and began to work part time as a free-lance journalist. Her work appeared in the weekly Creative Loafing newspaper (which has also operated under the name the Weekly Planet), primarily writing pieces related to the arts, but also becoming more and more involved in the Bay Area’s political scene.

As a Democrat, she was concerned by the confusion and apparent injustice of the 2000 Presidential Election. During that race, incumbent Vice-President Al Gore lost to Governor George W. Bush of Texas. Due to apparent problems with the voting system in some Florida Counties, the outcome of the presidential election remained in doubt for some weeks, while Republican and Democratic operatives battled over the validity of the ballots, the counting process, and the mechanisms in place for review. In response to the
outcome, many Bay Area Democrats formed groups intended to campaign vigorously for a return of a Democrat to the White House.

Mulhern continued to develop her professional life, as well, starting her Mary Mulhern and Associates graphic design and copywriting business. This business, conducted primarily from the front-room/office of her home in South Tampa’s comparatively affluent Hyde Park neighborhood, was almost the ideal job for a would-be political campaigner. She had the tools at her disposal to assemble much of her campaign’s signs, palm-cards, and literature right there in her home, and the flexibility in her job to be able to run the campaign efficiently.

Mulhern is married and has two children. Her husband, Cam Dilley, is an advertising executive at a Tampa firm and is, perhaps, better known as a disc jockey at WMNF radio, a local community radio station. Dilley was a founding member of WMNF and has attained a measure of celebrity due to his involvement with the station. Mulhern’s two children, a daughter and a son, are in college and elementary school, respectively, at the time of this writing, but during the campaigns, they were both enrolled in Hillsborough County public schools.

She was, at the time of this writing, the sister-in-law of Jennifer Granholm, the Governor of the state of Michigan.

3.4.2 Rose Ferlita

Unlike Mulhern, Ferlita, Mulhern’s opponent in the 2006 County Commission race, is a Tampa native, tied closely to a fairly well-known Ybor City family (Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners website). Like Mulhern, Ferlita does not come from the traditional training ground for politicians – the law.
Ferlita, who was 60 at the time of the Commission race, was elected to Tampa City Council in 1999. Prior to election to the Commission, Ferlita operated a pharmacy near Ybor City. Her family owned the landmark Ferlita Bakery in Ybor City, and her family name is commemorated on several of the monuments in Ybor City’s Centennial Park (Ybor City Museum website). Ferlita went to the Academy of Holy Names, a private Catholic school in Tampa. Upon matriculation, she attended Loyola University in New Orleans. She then did graduate work at the University of Florida, training as a pharmacist.

Ferlita worked for 18 years as an employee of the the Eckerd Drugs chain of pharmacies, as well as the CVS/Pro Care chain. In 1984, Ferlita started her own small pharmacy, Rose Drugs, which has operated in Seminole Heights and South Tampa for over 22 years.

In 1999, she was elected to the Tampa City Council in a District 2 (at-large or city-wide district), following what is described as a grass-roots campaign by her Wikipedia page (Ferlita, Rose Wikipedia page). She won by a narrow margin (just 14 votes!). In 2003, she was reelected by handily beating outsider candidate Kelly Benjamin with 68.1% of the vote (Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections website).

There are term limits on the occupants of City of Tampa offices – a given person can only be a City Council Member for two terms from any one district. As Ferlita approached the end of her tenure as the representative of City Council, District 2, she set her sights on the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners, which is the legislative body analogous to the City Council. She ultimately won that race, defeating Mulhern, attaining over 58% of the vote.
Ferlita is unmarried and has no children.

3.4.3 Shawn Harrison

Mulhern’s opponent in her second bid for office, Shawn Harrison, was already a sitting member of City Council at the time of the election. Harrison was born in 1965 and, like Mulhern, is not a Florida native. He is originally from Anderson, Indiana. He attended the University of South Florida, obtaining a bachelor’s degree before transferring to the University of Florida, where he attained a degree in law. Harrison’s legal specialty is commercial litigation (Harrison, Shawn Wikipedia page). Prior to serving on the City Council, Harrison held a position on the Tampa Palms Community Development District. Tampa Palms is one of the larger components of the New Tampa neighborhood roped into the City of Tampa in 1985.

While Harrison could no longer run for office in his neighborhood (District 7, which comprises the northern “peninsula” of the city), the City of Tampa does allow Council members to extend their tenure in office by running for one of the three at-large or city-wide seats. Alternatively, a city-wide seat holder could run for a neighborhood-based seat upon reaching the term limit. Harrison’s campaign was an attempt to move into the seat vacated by Ferlita, when she departed for the County Commission: District 2, at-large. Harrison ultimately lost to Mulhern by a narrow margin – fewer than 1000 votes separated Harrison and Mulhern out of 25,859 total votes cast in the race.

Harrison is married and has two children.
4 Methods

I woke well before dawn. My partner, Julie, handed me the day’s paper and one of the half-liter beer steins that we use as coffee mugs. While we drank our coffee, I read the paper, paying special attention to the St. Petersburg Times Tampa and State (now called the Metro) section and the Tampa Tribune Metro section. Since it was an election year, both papers had several reporters covering the political beat, dramatically increasing the number of writers, photographers, columnists, and editors assigned to the subject. Midterm elections do not generally have the same furor as the Presidential election years, but they have their own excitement level. The fact that the Presidency is not being decided actually increases the local coverage, perhaps because there isn’t as much at the national level distracting reporters.

Much of the coverage in Tampa in 2006 was devoted to those at the United States senate level, where incumbent Bill Nelson was opposed by Katherine Harris, a Congresswoman and former Florida Secretary of State. Harris, a Republican Party loyalist who is widely seen as being part of the chain of events that resulted in the contested election of George W. Bush in 2000, was not treated with the respect due a former rising star in the G.O.P. Her campaign was widely regarded as disorganized and subject to the caprices of the increasingly erratic candidate. In fact, during the race, political people of my acquaintance began using the phrase “Katherine Harris crazy” to indicate any seriously flawed or impaired judgment on the campaign trail. For example, I heard one staffer rebuking her candidate: “If we put out the mailers the way they look
right now, it would just be Katherine Harris crazy.” The expression became a commonplace among political insiders.

Races at the top of the ticket, like the Governor’s race, the Senatorial race, and some of the state of Florida cabinet-level positions (in Florida, the Governor’s Cabinet is selected by the electorate, rather than appointed), attract a great deal of coverage from the press. Some other races, like the ugly, contentious State Senate race between Charlie Justice and Kim Berfield excited interest on the part of the press, mostly because of the bitter feuding between the two campaigns. However, as you move lower on the ballot, there is less general interest on the part of the press. Such was certainly the case in 2006. Bottom-of-the-ticket candidates are running for offices that lack in public enthusiasm under the best of circumstances. It is not surprising, perhaps, that there would not be that much coverage of a candidate for the County Commission.

Political gossip is one of the forms of currency in the world of political campaigns, however. Knowing lots of people, even on the most casual level, is highly respected. There is a certain thrill that comes from being able to claim that you have met someone who holds high public office and there is a whole class of people, snidely referred to as “butt-sniffers” by political insiders, who attend political events solely for the purpose of meeting candidates and mingling with office holders. Sarcastic remarks aside, a person who knows many people (candidates and staff members) is a valuable person and being able to follow a conversation about campaigns is one of the keys to developing knowledge of the community. Thus, the newspaper. Every day during the campaign, I started with the two newspapers, reading the local news, then the editorial pages.
Having read those, I filled a small cooler with ice, sodas, and bottles of water. Then, I put on my light blue campaign t-shirt and lots of sunscreen and headed to the candidate’s house in South Tampa. Mulhern lived, at the time of the campaign, in an older suburban neighborhood to the southwest of downtown Tampa. Attractive, older homes lined the narrow, shady streets. Not far away is the Bayshore, the longest uninterrupted stretch of sidewalk in the world, with some of the most expensive property in the Tampa Bay Area. Also nearby is MacDill Air Force Base, surrounded by low-cost and transient accommodations. At the house, Mulhern greeted me and we discussed the strategy for the day.

Canvassing is a very simple task that is supplemented by a great deal of technique and technology. The canvass, as a tool of politics has been a powerful component of politics for many, many years. Abraham Lincoln, for example, when asked for advice about getting elected, suggested that getting elected was simple: you just make a list of everyone who will vote for you and make sure they show up on Election Day. How do you make such a list? Canvass. How do you make sure they show up? Canvass.

At its most basic level, canvassing involves walking the streets of the district in which your candidate is running and reminding the residents of that district who to vote for on election day. Approach a door, knock, chat, pass literature, repeat. And again. And again. And another time. And so on.

Canvassing in Florida in the summer (and even the fall!) requires comfortable shoes, capacious pockets (to hold pens, campaign literature and perhaps a bottle of water), and a convenient means for re-hydration. Sunglasses can be an asset when you’re standing on a corner waving a sign, but they are a liability on a canvass. Not only do
sunglasses hinder your ability to make eye-contact with the resident with whom you are speaking, they also limit your own ability to see hazards. I was startled by large dogs on two separate occasions because I was wearing sunglasses as I strolled onto a shady front porch. In addition to these fundamental pieces of equipment, you should also have a clipboard with a list of homes that you will visit.

You can’t guarantee that someone will speak with you however, and it can be a lonely, boring job, walking down streets and knocking on the doors of seemingly vacant houses.
4.1 Methodology

From the beginning, this was both a participant observation project and an action research project. My involvement, which began with the fundraising party mentioned in the first vignette, blossomed throughout the campaign. For a period of time, during the hottest days of summer, I effectively was Mulhern’s campaign, following her to neighborhoods to canvass, waving signs on street corners, managing her website, and helping to write or edit campaign press releases. I also conducted opposition research, trying to collect as much information as I possibly could about Mulhern’s opponent, Rose Ferlita. I was a fully engaged participant in this process. I wore many hats in this project, all of them negotiated with Mulhern. At times, she needed an extra body at a public event; on other occasions, she needed to know about a particular issue or topic. All of my efforts were coordinated with Mulhern and the campaign. My methods and techniques are described below.

Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) suggest that making theory explicit is an essential first step in the research process. Briefly, my operating theory is this:

1) Hegemonic power, while dominant, is not completely dominant.

2) One way that hegemonic power can be expressed is through management of ideology. Other ways include institutional processes and other expressions of policy.

3) Ideology is a contestable domain and members of a society have different streams of ideology from which they can choose (although, of course,
some streams are much more attractive or compelling than others, due to the influence of power).

4) Institutional processes are very difficult to influence unless you are already in a position of power and authority.

5) My point of intervention will be in the formation of political ideology such that I will challenge hegemonic political control because it is a contestable domain that can point to fissures within the hegemonic climate and create wedges between members of the hegemonic block.

Now, from the outset, I will concede that these assumptions and the conclusion that I draw from them are contested terrain. Furthermore, I concede the inherent difficulties associated with researching a population (politicians) who are simultaneously heavily scrutinized and thoroughly involved in managing the information they convey to a public audience, whether that audience is at a rally, in a meeting for a legislative body, or in a one-on-one interview. Nevertheless, this is my objective and these are the assumptions that I use as a starting point. The remainder of this chapter will discuss some methods I intend to use, some styles or genre of ethnographic research, and the role of ethics and advocacy in the project I am undertaking.

This is my general plan, stated as briefly as possible. Elements of the plan will be described in subsequent sections. Using observation, interviews, and document review, I attempted to undertake an advocacy or action research project, working with a political candidate, with the objective of studying the candidate’s opponent for the purposes of identifying and responding to the opponent’s ideology. In part, my mission was to listen for potential fissures in the hegemonic formation. For example, if the opponent was
expressing a view that constituted a break from conventional Republican Party strategy, I was to formulate a response that drew attention to the disjuncture. I was also responsible for writing portions of the candidate’s official public opinions for the purposes of debates or securing endorsements. I operated from the outset with the assumption that no group was off limits for us. We wrote endorsement requests to traditional Democratic allies (minority, gay and lesbian, and labor groups) but I also contended for law enforcement and business endorsements. All this was an effort to attack fissures within the hegemonic formation, through the tool of ideology.

Here are some details associated with this plan.
4.2 Methods for political processes

The anthropology of things political has been around since the beginning of anthropology as a discipline. It could be said that the methods of anthropology are the methods of political anthropology. As a cultural construct, one that involves social interaction, language, and even physical remnants of various sorts, political anthropology runs the gamut of social situations. In one of the earliest explorations of political anthropology, Rivers (1906) explored political life among the Todas’ Kuudr Lineage, using a genealogical method that traced the descent of hereditary power. Vincent’s 1990 treatment of this subject discusses Rivers’ awareness of the colonial process that had begun the lineage system initially: in 1906, Rivers was exploring issues of power, authority, and colonialism using a method that has become almost synonymous with traditional ethnographic fieldwork. In other words, there’s a rich and diverse history of field methods associated with political anthropology.

In their work regarding elites, Shore and Nugent demonstrate that methods that work well with the study of elites are ethnographic methods (2002). The various articles included in the monograph are ethnographies, anthropologists reporting on the field. Similarly, Nader (to cite two divergent examples, 1972 and 2002) has always used ethnographic methods to study political processes, in her investigations of how the legal institution operates.

Three relevant categories of ethnographic research are: observation; ethnographic interview; content analysis of secondary text or visual data; and, as a correlative to
interview and content analysis, some elicitation methods were used (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:128-129).

Observation, in this sense, is anthropology’s original “killer application.” (A “killer application” or “killer app” is a term from the computer industry that means the application that makes people value a new technology). In ethnographic research, observation sets the scene and shows how things happen. Observation can involve participation in the process observed. Participant observation “means near-total immersion when ethnographers live in unfamiliar communities” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:92). While the community in question is hardly unfamiliar, “near-total immersion” is well nigh unavoidable.

Some things that can be expected of successful participant observation are depictions of physical settings, acts, activities, interaction patterns, meanings, beliefs, and emotions (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:92; Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:91). Dewalt and Dewalt (1998:264) argue that participant observation should be done for two reasons: “First, it enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork. Second, it enhances the quality of the interpretation of data.” In a moment, we will discuss document review as an element of this project, but it should be noted that the ambiguity of the printed word can be clarified significantly by having actual access to the people who created it, both in terms of the initial exploration and the final analysis. This is done by “sharing the lives of people over a significant amount of time” Dewalt and Dewalt (1998:265). People do not convey all the information they could convey through their public documents and official utterances. Politicians are human beings with personal agendas and styles of interaction and those things should be explored if possible.
The best way to do that is to garner an opportunity to see the population in question involved in the process being studied. In this case, the politician in question is a sitting one, who appears publicly both at campaign-associated events as well as her official duties as a public official. Several techniques associated with participant observation, like mapping (both literal and figurative mapping), and carefully transcribing field-notes, are relevant to the exploration of political behavior, because it is in the revelation of subtleties of behavior and interaction that we can expect to see interpersonal power being deployed (note, for example, the discussion of how power and prestige are revealed through observation Schensul, Schensul and Lecompte 1999:113; note, also, Angrosino and Mays de Perez’s discussion of how power is deployed in interactions 2000:680-683). To suggest a crude example, if a subject appears at a public meeting alone or in a limousine with a driver, it will express different aspects of their power or access to economic resources.

The next research method used was be in-depth, open-ended interviewing. Purposes for this method include eliciting answers to open-ended questions in order to secure detailed information on selected topics, to amass cultural knowledge, and to learn more about the processes explored than can be revealed in observation (Lecompte and Schensul 1999:128). However, unlike most multi-method research projects, the interviews for this project were done with the candidate and staff for whom I was working, rather than the subject that I observed. The purpose is to “expand the researcher’s knowledge of areas about which little is known” (Schensul, Schensul and Lecompte 1999:122). Levy and Hollan (1998) discuss the relationship of individuals to a larger social formation, a distinction that is especially helpful in the context of this study.
While politics are a phenomena that involves massive societal apparatus it is understood that politicians and their staffs are individuals who have unique understandings of the relationships and institutions that are involved.

The third research method employed on this project was a content analysis of secondary text or visual data. The purpose of this will be to garner “themes or content in a body of written or visual media” (Lecompte and Schensul 1999:129; Schensul, Schensul, and Lecompte 1999:201-229). Public figures generate vast quantities of documents related to their activities. While it could be argued that more scrutiny is required in order to guarantee ethical behavior, the fact remains that public record laws stipulate the creation of transcripts, the assemblage of documentary evidence, and the creation of video-recorded records related to council meetings and public appearances. This wealth of information would be examined by a political campaign as part of routine opposition research in any case, so reviewing the material is a way in which the research ambitions of this project dovetail with the needs of the client. Due to the time constraints, extensive coding or documentation of the materials reviewed may not be possible, but the materials do constitute a trail of behavior undertaken by the population.

The last method I will discuss before turning to the question of an over-arching methodology is what Lecompte and Schensul describe as an elicitation method (1999:129). This method is, in a way, an extension of the content analysis method mentioned above. Effectively, the process here is to collect documents and elicit response from a respondent. For example, I could show a candidate an article about their opponent and ask for clarification or suggestions for things to explore in the other areas of research. Throughout the campaign, Mulhern provided me, unsolicited with running
commentary about her campaign, her opponent’s campaign, and overall electoral conditions. As an activist as well as a candidate, she always had plenty to say on each of these topics. Politicians, in my limited experience, love to talk about politics.
4.3 Applied Research: Projects and Situations

In this section, I will discuss the two types or styles of research that are involved in the project that I am undertaking. First, I will discuss what Trotter and Schensul describe as Advocacy or Action Research, then I will discuss the somewhat confusingly named Participatory Action Research (1998:693).

4.3.1 Advocacy and Action Research

For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to this style of applied work as advocacy, and reserve the use of the term action for the subsequent section. It should be noted, however, that the use of the term action has been common in anthropology since the 1950’s. Participatory Action Research is a distinct type of project that has also been referred to as “research and development anthropology” (a term used by Chambers 1989).

Advocacy research (or action research in this sense) originates from a body of work initiated by Sol Tax in the 1950’s (Chambers 2000:859) as a client-oriented attempt to resolve particular social problems. The intent of advocacy research is a process “specifically directed toward identifying, critiquing, and addressing imbalances in allocation of power, economic resources, social status, material goods, and other desired social or economic elements in a community, society, or globally” (Trotter and Schensul 1998:693). While advocacy research is one of the oldest and most storied varieties of applied anthropology, it is not without detractors.
Critics of the strategy have suggested that it is difficult if not impossible to do
good research while involved on behalf of one side or another of a dispute (Hastrup and
Elsass 1990). Further, these particular critics level perhaps the most severe criticism that
can be leveled against an anthropologist in the late Twentieth Century:

When anthropologists use their knowledge for a particular cause, they can
be charged with furthering [colonialism through paternalism]. The
criticism is based on the allegation that ‘speaking for’ often involves the
creation of ‘clients’ who play a passive role. – Hastrup and Elsass
(1990:302-303)

The article levels serious concerns about the morality of interested research.

In a brief response to the Hastrup and Elsass piece, Singer suggests that all efforts
to gather information about the human condition are a form of advocacy and that efforts
to promote specific interests of a subordinate group are, by comparison, a more action-
oriented advocacy (1990:548-549). Indeed, Singer goes so far as to indicate that those
who do not occasionally advance the interests of a specific group cannot effectively
advance the interests of the species (1990:549). Science is a human endeavor, he writes,
and as such, is inherently political (ibid.). While Singer agrees that “a commitment to
improving the world is not a substitute for understanding it” (ibid.), he concludes by
saying “knowledge generation and knowledge utilization are inseparable” (1990:550).

Ultimately, all scientific knowledge is used. The question really is: Who will use
it? Kirsch (2002) asks the value of anthropological research with reference to the
population studied. Are there times when neutrality goes beyond an adherence to a
scientific method and starts looking like negligence? Kirsch describes his contributions
to a lawsuit launched by an indigenous population that was suffering environmental
damage as a result of the mining operation conducted by a major corporation.
Subsequently, a scholarly response to his article criticized Kirsch for allying himself explicitly with one side of the dispute because it weakened the political position of anthropologists as arbitrators in the situation. Kirsch responds by suggesting that his ability to remain neutral was abrogated by the corporation’s power and influence. Kirsch contends that the situation was fixed from the outset: Corporations had massive influence through their economic and political resources. There never was a neutral situation for Kirsch to arbitrate. Indeed, Kirsch concludes his description of this informative anecdote by saying that none of the putatively neutral social scientists or those who were employed by the corporation were able to facilitate communication between the corporation and the indigenous population who owned the land (2002:177-184). Kirsch’s explicit use of his knowledge in the capacity as a cultural broker enabled him to secure at least some assistance for the indigenous population. Other examples, such as Keen (1992) demonstrate that resistance to the idea of advocacy and anthropological involvement actually are not compelling arguments for neutrality but, rather, a supply of scholarship that the other side can use to undermine such attempts at advocacy.

Further, Drury and Stott point out that in some conflicted situations, it is difficult if not impossible to collect data without assuming a level of bias or interest in the proceedings (2001:51). The authors demonstrate through examples that a lack of interest would have precluded the necessary trust and interaction to actually do the data collection. They cite an instance of a researcher taking on the role of a striker so that he could collect information about a strike. Particularly in instances involving crowds and conflict, Drury and Stott suggest that assuming a position in accord with one of the interested parties in a dispute may actually improve data collection.
4.3.2 Participatory Action Research

We have already made some assumptions regarding ethics in this essay. First, we assumed that assuming a position would not be harmful. Further, we contended that all research is, to a certain extent, a form of ethical involvement, or advocacy. We concluded that section by suggesting that far from acting as an impediment, taking an ethical position can actually improve the quality of the work. Beyond simply feigning support for a side (although I do not propose that this is that Drury and Stott were suggesting), action research actually encourages the researcher to become a fully-involved, embedded participant in the process.

From an anthropological standpoint, Participatory Action Research “involves several critical elements including: a long-term partnership with those who are going to take action… continuous interaction of research with the action through joint researcher/actor data collection, analysis, reflection; and use” (Trotter and Schensul 1998:693). For some researchers employing this strategy, the term participatory action research is confounded by the fact that this term has a specifically feminist or revolutionary connotation (Greenwood and Levin 1998:174-175). In some cases, the word Southern is used to create more of a meaningful difference in the term. Notable in this variety of action research is Fals Borda’s conception of the key elements of a more explicitly revolutionary action research: recognizing and appreciating “the role played by popular wisdom, common sense and working class culture so as to obtain and create scientific knowledge on the one hand; and, on the other, recognize the role of the parties and other political or union organizations as controllers and receptors of research work and as historical protagonists” (Fals Borda 1979:43). It’s an appealing admonition.
While revolutionary ambitions are not entirely outside the purview of this project, I will not confound matters further by over-thinking this. When I use the term participatory action research, I mean it in the sense that Trotter and Schensul mean it, rather than Greenwood and Levin. This definition actually bears more in common with Greenwood and Levin’s more general definition of the concept of action research: “[Action Research] is social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve their situation” (Greenwood and Levin 1998:4).

Clearly, in the specific case of this research project, these criteria were met. Mulhern and I discussed strategy throughout the campaign. Her suggestions were pre-eminent, because it was, after all, her campaign, but the fact that my suggestions were incorporated as a junior partner was, in itself, a statement about the power relationship and the problem that we were collectively undertaking.

Despite this terminological inconsistency, there are some invaluable parallels between the research proposed and the Trotter and Schensul definition of participatory action research. Firstly, being embedded within a political campaign is invaluable because the campaign can act as respondents, informants, and guides to a researcher. On the other hand, the data-gathering tools mentioned above are both time consuming and require a certain expertise and a skilled researcher dedicated to the project could find himself in a position to facilitate the political campaign with which he is affiliated. Second, the research would be truly collaborative. While the expertise of an outside professional researcher might be useful in itself, the talents, observations and wisdom of insiders would dramatically improve results.
Trotter and Schensul somewhat problematically conflate the concept with the Cornell-Vicos experiment, which “merged scientific research with ongoing contributions to improving agriculture, education, housing, and other social domains” (1998:693). Cornell-Vicos has been criticized because of the perception that the researchers did not actually change the power relationship between the indigenous population and their landlords (Bennett 1996:S39). However, participatory action research does have some tangible benefits. Trotter and Schensul call this variety of action research an iterative process, meaning that researchers can return to the population with whom they are working and clarify, modify, and expand on issues described (1998:723-724).
4.4 Applied Tradition: Conclusion

This brief treatment has been an effort to explore some of the methodological issues associated with exploring political behavior. Doing research in a political setting requires the assumption of a political position with regard to the research subject. Advocacy and action allow the researcher to benefit maximally from the positioned involvement, thus benefiting both the researcher and the population itself.
On a hot summer night, we went to a candidate forum in the southern reaches of the district. After driving almost all the way out of the county, we arrived at a small...
community almost hidden by the tiny strip malls and short vegetation lining the sides of old Highway 41.

This neighborhood is unincorporated, meaning that although they are represented on the County Commission and in the state legislature, they have no other form of political representation. Like other residents of unincorporated areas, they are a little leery of politicians from the City of Tampa, which has held a dominant position over county politics for such a long time.

Prior to the start of the session, I place Mary Mulhern yard signs outside in the parking lot. This was our first opportunity to test our new stand-up Mary signs. These were the life-sized cutouts of Mary, like giant paper dolls, depicting Mary holding a yard sign and waiving. Since this was our first attempt to deploy them, we were dismayed to discover that we had dramatically underestimated the amount of strength that it takes to drive a two-by-two stake into the ground in order to hold up the Velcro-backed stand-up. We did the best we could to put them out where they could be seen by arriving participants, flanking them with conventional yard signs.

As we did this, campaign volunteers for Mary’s opponent, Rose Ferlita, showed up and began deploying Rose’s straightforward gold, white, and blue yard signs. The warm wind picked up and the stand-ups began to waver. One of Rose’s campaign volunteers offered to keep an eye on our signs while we went in. Naively, perhaps, we accepted his offer and entered the building.

This was a community center with room for about 75-100 people. There were about 20 chairs spread in rows in front of a table where the candidates were to sit, facing the audience. To the right, a podium stood, where the host of the meeting would stand,
asking questions of the candidates. Ultimately, about 20 to 30 people attended, necessitating the distribution of a few more chairs.

I sat in the front row, with Mary’s teen-aged daughter. Later, I would realize that sitting in the front is not especially helpful, because you cannot, then, see how the audience is reacting, nor can you slip out of the meeting unnoticed. However, I was wearing a campaign t-shirt and, being a fairly large person, represented the largest advertisement for Mulhern’s candidacy. About two-thirds of the people in the room came from somewhere other than that immediate area – both candidates lived in South Tampa, a 20 minute drive from the community center, and they were both accompanied by retinues: Mary Mulhern had her daughter and me; Rose Ferlita had about 12-15 t-shirt wearing supporters, most of whom came from the city, rather than this area. In other words, campaign supporters outnumbered citizens during this candidate forum.

When the moderator began the questions, he started with Mulhern. She is not a large woman, although she does have a clear voice that is capable of easily addressing crowds without amplification, whether she is seated or standing. In responding to the question, she remained seated. Next, when it was Ferlita’s turn, Ferlita stood up and walked in front of the table and directly to the center of the crowd. As Ferlita sat back down, I signaled to Mulhern that she should do the same thing when she was next asked a question, which she did, saying “Oh, I didn’t know we were standing for this debate” before walking around the table, as Ferlita had done.

Both candidates stuck close to their published campaign material, offering not-detailed suggestions and promises regarding their forthcoming work in office. Ferlita pointed to her record on City Council. Mulhern suggested that there was a need for
change on the County Commission and that her outsider status made her the change candidate.

After the forum, which never elevated to the tension of a debate, the few unaffiliated citizens that attended approached Mulhern and asked her for campaign material.

When we went outside, Ferlita and her supporters had largely left the parking lot.

We went outside to collect our signs. Our stand-up signs were lying face down on the ground.
5.1 Chronology

My initial contact with the Mulhern campaign took place on February 8, 2006. A friend involved in Democratic politics suggested that I should attend the meeting described in the vignette at the beginning of the Introduction chapter. After the events described in the vignette, I met with Mulhern and her campaign treasurer at a coffee shop not too far from her house. Mulhern was eager to bring me into the campaign, but her treasurer, who had a bit more experience with operating campaigns than Mulhern, expressed reluctance initially. We agreed that I would perform a piece of research for the campaign and, in exchange for this good-faith offering, they would consider adding me to the campaign. That went well and I was given further assignments.

In the middle of March, I did my first real assignment for the campaign, which involved doing opposition research on a candidate that, ultimately, dropped out of the primary race against Mulhern. Using newspaper sources, I found articles related to Mulhern’s fellow Democrat, an environmental activist who had lost a state legislative race against an experienced Republican opponent.

In April, I was a fully integrated member of the campaign. I did opposition research both on Mulhern’s Democratic opponent and the presumptive GOP frontrunner, Ferlita. Ferlita had name recognition, eight years in public office, and she was the locally noted owner of a popular business, so she was very likely to be the opponent of whoever survived the primary process. During this early phase, I was attending as many campaign events as possible (candidate forums, primarily) and I was learning who was who in the
local Democratic Party political scene. So much of the political process involves simply getting out of the house and letting people know you’re running. While I was attending candidate forums with or on behalf of Mulhern, she was knocking on doors in her neighborhood, alerting her neighbors that she was seeking the County Commission seat. Later, I would join her on her canvassing, but in this early phase, I was primarily concerned with opposition research and supporting Mulhern at events.

Another early effort related to our attempts to circumvent the $5530 Qualifying Fee that candidates must pay to get on the ballot. The fee is set by a formula set by the Supervisor of Elections. It is a variable scale based on the number of eligible voters in a given district. If a candidate chooses not to submit the fee, he or she can file petitions from voters in his or her district; the number of petitions for any given elective office is also set by a mathematical formula based on voter roles. For Mulhern to avoid the fee, she needed to collect 1480 petitions from eligible voters in the election district. While Mulhern was undertaking her early canvasses, she brought petitions with her. In May of 2006, we expanded the petition drive, and I found myself enlisted as a petition gatherer. I was abysmal at this task, even given large events to practice my skills. At one point, we attempted to get attendees at a concert to fill out petitions. Although I spoke to dozens of concert-goers, I only managed to get two successfully completed petitions; I got nearly a dozen that could not be used for various reasons. During this month, Mulhern’s Democratic Primary opponent, Deborah Cope, withdrew from the race, shifting her resources to compete for the District 57 State House of Representatives seat, a seat that she had unsuccessfully sought during the 2004 election cycle.
In June, Mulhern’s campaign focused almost exclusively on the petition drive. To avoid that fee, petitions needed to be submitted by the 19th of June. Mulhern’s volunteers deployed in a campaign within the campaign, stalking shopping centers and other public locations, seeking signatures. The drive fell just 63 petitions short, resulting in the need for a quickly organized fund-raising drive, designed in part to sustain the campaign, but also to fill the immediate need for the Qualifying Fee. She raised the needed funds, enabling her to continue. We also spent part of this month seeking endorsements from different groups, filling out questionnaires at the request of the endorsing group.

In July, the Mulhern campaign shifted gears. During this month, I focused primarily on the job of collecting opposition research on our presumptive opponent, Rose Ferlita. At this point, Ferlita had not yet been selected by her party to be the nominee – there were still four Republicans officially seeking the seat, although Ferlita was, at that point, essentially campaigning only against Brad Swanson. Swanson campaigned on a very conservative platform, attempting to present Ferlita as too moderate for true conservative voters (Zink 2006; Reyes 2006). “Our party is littered with these liberals… it’s time to put a stop to it – and we can start with our local races,” said one Swanson campaign flier cited in the Zink article.

Swanson attacked Ferlita in a series of campaign mailings, criticizing her commitment to the conservative base of the party and suggesting that she was responsible for tax increases. Perhaps more damningly, Swanson suggested in another mailer that the gay and lesbian community were endorsing Ferlita. For Democrats, like Mulhern, an endorsement from the gay and lesbian community would, at least, not harm their candidacy. But for Ferlita, this was very serious indeed. Mulhern was not asked to
comment on this intraparty squabbling by the press and she took no official position on the matter. At the end of July, we continued to acquire opposition research, primarily focusing on Ferlita. We were operating under the assumption that Ferlita was still our opponent in the Fall, primarily because of her name recognition and public visibility.

In August, the campaign continued to amass opposition research. Throughout the campaign, the intent was to “get something on” Ferlita, who had long been regarded as the front-runner on the Republican side. My initial efforts in this area involved tracking campaign donations to Ferlita’s campaign. I created a master spreadsheet, from the information submitted to the Supervisor of Elections office. Every campaign donation must be accompanied by an explanation of who gave the donation, where they live, and, if the donation is over $100, what the donor does for a living. I also looked through Ferlita’s voting record, using both the complicated City of Tampa record keeping system (see my comments on this system below) as well as the newspaper accounts of City Council meetings in which Ferlita had a visible presence. I also used search engine technology to see if there were business dealings or personal problems that could be brought to life. Little information presented itself.

I was especially interested in finding occasions where Ferlita committed to one position or another. My hope, that she would make some explicit statement that could be used as a wedge, separating her from supporters, was scarcely fulfilled. In the few moments where I did see positions of a partisan nature in Ferlita’s politics, Mulhern was reluctant to take a contrary position. For example, when I noted that one of the only distinctly Republican positions that Ferlita had was a general, but not mechanical, dislike
of taxation, Mulhern (probably reasonably) suggested that it was inadvisable to take a pro-tax stance.

In the period leading up the primary election in September, Mulhern began attending candidate forums in various parts of the county, including the western county forum described in the vignette at the beginning of the second chapter. We also began writing letters to the editor, attacking Ferlita, who was still serving as a county commissioner, and supporting Mulhern. Some of the letters were printed, most were not. A pattern emerged where I would write a letter attacking our opponent, or one of Mulhern’s other advisors would, and Mulhern would reject the letter, expressing concern that if she were to initiate an attack on Ferlita, that she would then be obliged to continue to attack her in public forums. She was concerned that Ferlita would begin attacking her in response, and she did not want to risk being perceived as a negative candidate. This was not an illegitimate fear: Swanson’s attacks on Ferlita’s character and credentials had garnered support for Ferlita from the newspapers as well as hostility toward Swanson. The area’s two major daily newspapers both endorsed Ferlita in the Primary Election.

As a campaign visibility event, Mulhern rode public transportation. She invited reporters to ride with her, as a demonstration of the inadequacies of the bus system.

In September, the Primary Election did, indeed, confirm Ferlita as the GOP Candidate. The day after the primary, the events described in the Platt Street Bridge vignette (at the beginning of the third chapter) occurred. Campaign visibility was a real priority for us this month. We waved signs at passing traffic on numerous occasions during this month and in the months leading up to the election. Our limited resources prevented us from engaging in the more costly forms of mass communication, including
billboards and radio advertisements, which Ferlita’s campaign had done. We continued
to amass opposition research, with the frustrating results described in the section about
government records, below. We attended several candidate forums during this month,
including the one described at the beginning of this chapter.

In October, we settled in to a fairly serious campaign of canvassing coupled with
public visibility. As a campaign, we knocked on hundreds of doors, usually using voter
data acquired from the Democratic Party. No more did we attend candidate forums. Our
focus was on individual voters who were, perhaps, too busy to attend such forums.
Unlike many campaigns, we did not have a script for conducting our conversations with
voters. However, the following is a fairly typical introduction:

“Hi, my name is E.J. Ford,” I would begin. “And I’m here in your neighborhood,
talking to people about my friend, Mary Mulhern. Mary is running for County
Commission, representing this district. I have some campaign literature I would like to
give you.” I would present them with a Mulhern palm card (Mulhern’s palm card, as well
as Ferlita’s pamphlet are depicted at the beginning of this chapter). At that point, our
primary tactic was to listen to the person. Mulhern told me that people were more likely
to have a positive impression of us, as we canvassed, if we let them tell us what
concerned them, rather than making campaign promises. Sometimes the conversation
would end with the palm card. On a few occasions, the conversation took nearly half an
hour, as a disgruntled citizen expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo. Mulhern
believed that dissatisfaction worked to her advantage, because she was an outsider who
could not be blamed for the shortcomings of the present administration.

Mulhern’s core message is best encapsulated on her palm card:
• Vision
  o Economic development to attract quality business, high wage jobs. Promote affordable housing.
  o Mass transit that works for working people. Light rail and expanded bus system.
  o Environment – Responsible growth to protect water and air quality. Sustainable, energy efficient building and transportation.

• Honesty
  o Independent public servant who answers to the voters, not special interests
  o Code of ethics for county government

• Fairness
  o Development that pays its fair share
  o Cooperation and civility – regionally and locally
  o Fiscal Responsibility – Public dollars for sensible priorities – safety, transportation, education.

As I detail in the campaign biography section, Mulhern was approaching this run for office as a political outsider who was frustrated by the political process. She felt that the County Commission had suffered from fractious, uncivil interactions for several years. Mulhern believed that part of the reason why the seat was available for a Democrat to seek was due to the frustration felt by the previous incumbent, Kathy Castor, who left the seat to run for Congress. Mulhern also believed that it was possible for a city like Tampa to be more like other cities in the United States. She pointed to Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, but she also felt that cities like Atlanta or Portland, Oregon could be examples for the area, too. Mulhern generally believed that more resources could be allocated to features that would improve quality of life in the city – more public transportation improves the environment and reduces road congestion; increased arts spending improves the general opinion that a city has of itself.

During the canvass, we concentrated mainly on those people who were registered Democrats although we did approach independent voters. We never avoided talking with
registered Republicans, if we ran into one. We took some solace in the fact that Ferlita
had not demolished Swanson in the election and we felt that, if we held our Democrat
voters and contested the independents, and garnered some support from disaffected
Republicans, we would stand a chance. Final campaign finance reports were due this
month (October), with Ferlita reporting $422,825 – far more than Mulhern, who would
finish her fundraising with just $54,728. Later, we would learn that Ferlita’s campaign
had raised more than anyone from any party for this level of governmental office in the
county’s history. Various campaigns for national office drew Democratic activists away
from Mulhern’s campaign; however, there was a certain amount of collaboration between
the Mulhern campaign and others, in canvassing. At the end of this month, both daily
papers endorsed Ferlita. The vignette at the beginning of chapter four describes a fairly
typical morning during this period of the campaign. Early voting began during October
(Florida conducts voting during the weeks leading up to a major election at a limited
array of polling places, scattered throughout the various precincts in each of the state’s
counties) and we made sure that Mary signs were deployed in front of the early polling
stations.

November began with an enormous crush of activity designed to attract last-
minute support from the voting populace. In addition to continuing to canvass, we also
attempted a last minute mailing to voters in the district, hundreds of postcards bearing
Mary’s image. During this late period, we also began placing yard signs promiscuously
around the city, gambling that the deployment of the signs, even if they were removed
within hours of placement, would still be seen by dozens of potential voters. We placed
yard signs in empty lots and along the rights of way of dozens of streets. We also placed
and replaced signs at the area’s polling places. The election was held on the seventh of this month and the events described in the first half of the vignette in the sixth chapter occurred on the seventh.

After Mulhern’s defeat, I counseled her to sit out the impending municipal elections, as I describe in the latter portion of the chapter six vignette. She did not follow my advice, however. Instead, she took time off until after the Christmas holiday, then launched a leaner, meaner campaign in the few months leading up to the March municipal elections.

One feature of the retooled campaign was that it recycled as much material from the County Commission campaign as possible. Mulhern used the same graphics, and, in some cases, the exact same materials, adjusting the one numerical difference (District 2 in the City Council race, as opposed to District 1 in the Commission race). Effectively, her platform was identical: vision, honesty, and fairness, with the bullet-points unchanged.

Another feature of the City Council campaign was an increase in campaign volunteers. With the conclusion of the 2006 Election Cycle, Democratic Party activists were suddenly available to assist Mary Mulhern’s City Council campaign, including a professional campaign manager who had just won a hotly contested State Senate race. Unpaid volunteers were, similarly, available during the City Council race. Mulhern mounted an inexpensive, efficient campaign, designed to capitalize on her name recognition as a candidate – after all, she had been running for an office (first Commission, then Council) for over a year by the time the 2007 Municipal elections were underway.
She also relied on the fact that her opponent, Shawn Harrison, had not previously run a city-wide campaign. She pressed him in every geographic area, deploying numerous canvassers to different districts of the city, even attempting to best Harrison in his home district, New Tampa. My involvement in the campaign primarily consisted of opposition research – finding articles or exploitable information about Harrison (again, finding very little), maintaining the campaign website, and periodically writing campaign literature during this period. In March of 2007, Mulhern won a seat on the City Council, as described in the chapter six vignette.
5.2 Some observations about local politics

In this section, I will discuss some of the elements of a political campaign for a local-level office, focusing especially on the way that campaign resources are deployed, coupled with the techniques employed in their use. It is insufficient to have a section cataloging the materiel of the campaign without also discussing usage. The presence of a stack of campaign signs, for example, is not enough to guarantee a win; only their deployment helps. So, along with each element, I will try to discuss technique.

Before we proceed, I would like to bring attention to two categories of political power described by Kurtz (2001:32-38). He describes political power as a combination of material and ideational resources. In the material domain, he lists supporters and tangible resources. Supporters are composed of three domains. The first of these are the followers, those who provide support if the leader does not disappoint them. In Florida politics, these are the electorate, the voters who choose one candidate over another in the voting booth. Followers can be fickle and Kurtz suggests that the rare commodity in a political system, whether it’s a big-man centered redistribution network or a giant industrial democracy, is the number of followers, who can switch allegiances abruptly. The next category of supporter is the benefactor. Benefactors provide access to tangible resources (campaign donations, the use of their home for a party or campaign event, and so forth). Wealth and resources are, of course, essential to political campaigns, but it is important not to confuse the dollar figure involved with the resources committed to the candidate. For example, while I was not compensated for the wear and tear the campaign
placed on my personal automobile, that resources definitely benefitted the campaign. It
does not show up on a campaign finance report, but it was a tangible resource that made
it possible for us to execute. The last category of supporter is that of loyalists, individuals
who, for at least the duration of the campaign, “are morally committed to a given leader”
(2001:33). Few campaigns survive without a core of followers who attend functions,
wave signs, make phone calls for the campaign, or any of a hundred other things that are
required. Obviously, these categories have permeable boundaries: while I was unable to
vote for Mulhern, because of my home voting precinct, I was able to be a benefactor
(contributed a small sum of money and the use of my car) and a follower (I was
committed to sticking with her and her campaign until the very end).

As Kurtz says of our next category, “[t]angible resources of power are culturally
specific” (2001:33). Any one of a number of things can be contributed to a political
campaign. Money is the most obvious, but, as I have shown, the contribution of a vehicle
can be a tangible resource, as can in-kind donations like food. Should a candidate hold a
spaghetti dinner, an essential fundraising and campaign visibility event in the West
Tampa political scene, the cook that prepares the food can contribute the value of the
food to the campaign and the campaign can (and indeed should) list the contribution as an
in-kind donation on their campaign finance form. This can be somewhat tricky, however.
Not all food donations, for example, are listed as campaign related. I know of at least one
campaign that often distributed donuts prior to campaign events, but did not list this as a
campaign expense, either as a direct expense or an acknowledgement of an in-kind
donation from the follower that provided them.
In the ideational resource domain, Kurtz lists three kinds of resources: ideological, symbolic, and informational. Ideological resources are those things (concepts, interpretations) that are manifestations of the ideology of the campaign. Reference to the section on ideology, above, may be helpful here, as is this context specific definition by Kurtz: “A political ideology is a system of hypotheses, principles, and postulates that justify the exercise of authority and power, assert social values and moral and ethical principles, set forth causal connections between leaders and the people they govern, and furnish guides for action” (2001:35). I also draw your attention to the definition that I used to conclude the section on ideology:

**Ideology** (n.) – A set of values, beliefs, and interpretations of the world that facilitates the continued operation of a given culture or subculture by explaining or rationalizing that group’s relationship to the means of production. Given the assumption that ideology is a byproduct of material, economic relationships in a given society, it must be understood that ideology does not have a deterministic effect on other aspects of the society. Rather, it is a social lubricant, making some alternatives more palatable, or more comprehensible than others.

As an example of this, on many occasions, our campaign tried to develop the narrative of the campaign – Mary Mulhern was a hardworking businesswoman; she was a good mother whose kids went to public school; she was a Democratic loyalist who deserved support from her party; she was more deserving of her office than her opponent, who was just another hack politician. Regardless of the truth values of any of these statements, they were part of the ideology we used to advance our campaign. Other aspects of the campaign ideology were: a vision for the future of the County/City, preferably including mass transit and economic development; a commitment to honesty and integrity in politics, especially in the sense of responding to voter concerns; and,
bringing a sense of fairness to the office, especially where development and growth were concerned. These are, of course, explanations of Mulhern’s entitlement to access power, rather than retro-active justifications of it. In hindsight, some of these have become the official explanations for why we won, but the creation/employment of the ideology was very much part of the process of gaining office. Another ideational resource is the use of symbols: “a material object, mental projection, action, idea, or word that human beings infuse with ambiguous, multiple and disparate meanings” (2001:35). In our campaign, we transformed Mulhern herself into a campaign tool through the use of the stand-up Mary Mulhern cutouts that I have mentioned previously (depicted in the photo at the beginning of chapters three and six). We tried to capitalize on the two-dimensional Marys by suggesting that that Mulhern was a stand-up (meaning reliable) person. Another symbol deployed was family: one piece of campaign literature displayed a family photo of Mulhern with her husband and two children. The third and final informational domain is the informational. Political figures maintain, consolidate, and even expand their power through the control of information. In a crooked pseudo-democracy, the vote is only as good as who owns the vote-counter, for one example. For another, see my discussion of the use of the Sunshine Law as a form of hegemonic control of information in my conclusion section. The use of information and its regulation can have an enormous impact on political processes.

As we proceed through a discussion of the following materials, consider the deployment of these elements of power. What kind of supporters are involved? What kind of tangible resources are expended? What are the ideological and/or symbolic
elements of the messages emanating from each campaign? What information is employed/accessed as part of the message?

Political campaigns rely on materials that cost varying amounts of campaign resources. From the fanciest television ad all the way down to the simple handshake on a potential voter’s doorstep, the campaign relies on the various accoutrements of politicking. The following is a brief summary of the elements of political campaigning, including the most costly in terms of financial resources as well as the least costly, which are often most costly in terms of personal resources (that is, volunteer time or candidate effort). Some political analysts (including one of Mulhern’s campaign advisors) indicate that you need to “touch” every contested voter at least six times prior to Election Day. Each of those “.touches” can take a different form. For example, a candidate could do a radio ad, a newspaper ad, a mass mailing of campaign literature, a palm card dropped at a door step, an actual in-person meeting during a campaign event of some kind, and a website. If each “touch” is done correctly, the right audience receives the prescribed touches and turns out to vote the right way. The list of methods described below should be regarded as ingredients of a successful political campaign rather than looking at any of them as the sole winning component. Further, the presence of all the elements should not necessarily be regarded as sufficient; consider the campaign of Mitt Romney during the 2008 election cycle – his campaign had all the elements below, but it did not excite a majority of voters. Rather, this list is an attempt to explain the process of taking a candidate and his or her message, and disseminating it to potential benefactors and supporters.
5.2.1 Electronic Campaign Materials

Most Americans are familiar with televised campaign ads. In them, the candidates are portrayed as backyard superheroes, capable of leading, fearless, and without ethical blemish. Either that or the candidate’s opponent is portrayed as a blackguard with the ethics of an alley cat. Television campaign ads are expensive, requiring a production crew, editing, writing, and permission to use locations for filming. All of that costs money. Then, having produced the ad, the campaign needs to purchase time on television to display the advertisement. All of this can amount to enormous costs. For example, Kim Berfield, a Republican candidate in the 2006 State Senate race spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on television ads (both production and placement) in her losing bid for office. The Victory Group, a media production company specializing in conservative political advertisements (www.e-victorygroup.com), created the ads for Berfield. The ads were particularly vicious and misleading in a campaign that became known throughout the region as a particularly bitter and contentious one.

Television ads are considered to be a powerful means for communicating with the electorate, but caution must be taken with purchasing ad time. For example, if an ad is purchased during a television show that does not fit a candidate’s target demographic then the ad will not have the effect desired by the candidate. An advertisement emphasizing the candidate’s appeal to working women will not attract the attention it should if the television program during which the ad is played is primarily viewed by male retirees. While these ads often go negative, casting scurrilous aspersions on the good name of the opponent, really hard negative material is often saved for direct mail, about which more in a moment.
Both major national parties invested heavily in their ability to target specific kinds of voters, rather than simply scattering advertisements over the whole community. The Democrats invested in a database system commonly called the VAN (Voter Activation Network) File, this database categorizes voters based on the number of times that they have voted in the last few elections, their racial information, their gender, their home address, and their party affiliation. Republicans have an even more elaborate system that involves even more personal information about voters, like whether they are National Rifle Association (NRA) members or not. Consider the power of a targeted advertisement, aimed at NRA members between the age of 25-40, who are male and subscribe to hunting or fishing magazines. Very specific tailoring of the message is possible. The objective is to avoid wasting time on voters that would not normally be expected to support a given candidate. Certain voters are considered “safe” for candidates, in which case little effort is normally spent sending advertising and campaign literature to those voters. For example, during Mulhern’s campaign, we spent little time approaching so-called “Super-Dems,” voters who have voted Democratic during the last four election cycles. The two parties have expressed reluctance in showing how their respective databases work, but the Republicans, by reputation, have the better network.

Another form of mass communication is radio. The oldest form of electronic communication is still very much alive and well in the political world. Talk radio, for many years a conservative stalwart, is a ripe ground for political advertising. Rose Ferlita spent $10,025.00 on radio ads during the campaign reporting cycle ending September 1, 2007, the cycle immediately prior to the primary election she won against a field of three other Republican candidates. While this may not seem like much, consider that the total
budget for many candidates for local office is less than $75,000.00. Mulhern’s campaign in 2006 had a total operating expenditure of $54,728.00. Radio ads tend to be a more effective for conservatives while other forms of electronic media tend to be more effective for liberal voters, according to a June 19, 2007 National Public Radio piece by political reporter Mara Liasson (2007). The established use of conservative talk radio as programming by some radio stations (for example Rush Limbaugh’s program) has a built-in audience for conservative-oriented political advertisements. Liasson suggests that techniques like email and blogging (described below) are seen as successful techniques by those who self-identify as liberal, in part because liberal/left voices are more rarely heard on commercial media outlets; thus, self-described liberals find their media needs met by the newer technologies.

Yet another typical form of electronic media access is another classic: phone banking. While this job traditionally required investment in a campaign office with phone lines, this is now often accomplished by purchasing disposable cell-phones with pre-paid minutes. In either case, the procedure is the same. Volunteers (or, in a small local race, even the candidate) get a phone list of likely voters and call them to remind them to turn out on Election Day. Phone banking is also used for raising campaign donations, which can be an endless process of candidates and volunteers placing unwelcome phone calls to unwilling potential voters. Candidates (including Mulhern) often complain about the amount of time they have to spend, during the election cycle, on the phone, begging for money. However, once elected, American politicians have indicated little willingness to restrict or eliminate that kind of campaign resource accumulation.
The Internet has, of course, begun to have an impact on voter communication. Websites, blogging, and email have all begun to play essential roles in the modern campaign. Almost every campaign has a website, which serves as both an advertisement for the candidate, a clearinghouse for information regarding campaign activities, and a way for the electorate to convey information and, more importantly, donations, to the candidate. Without such a mechanism, a campaign is even more reliant on the other forms of media. It is an inexpensive method of information distribution, and it can be editorially controlled entirely by the campaign, while other forms of media, like television, are subject to broadcast regulations as well as the caprices of the placement of a given ad during the broadcast day. Inexpensive ads on television are often inopportune, unwatched wastelands of the programming schedule. Websites are 24-hour affairs and can include sophisticated graphic design, photos, audio and video of the candidate, and even games or other amusements for visitors to the site. Campaigns (including Mulhern) often make reference to the web page, encouraging casual voters to spend some time there; campaigns almost uniformly have links on the site allowing campaign donations via the website. National campaigns have short videos and other amusements that are designed to encourage repeat visits. Some national campaign content rivals the sophistication of small to mid-sized businesses. Local campaigns amuse voters with humbler fare: photos and news clippings from the newspaper. Ferlita’s campaign website included a recurring feature called “Where’s Murray?” This consisted of a series of uncaptioned pictures of Ferlita with her dog, Murray, in various Tampa Bay area locations. Voters were encouraged to identify the location depicted and send an email into the campaign. Needless to say, in addition to amusing the visitor to
the site, this is a way for the campaign to collect email addresses, which can then be used to contact potential voters.

“Blogs” (a shortened form of “web-logs”), by contrast, are web-based forums where individual voters, political operatives, and political observers can share opinions or information in a more or less direct fashion with others. The blogs, which are often hosted by local, more conventional media outlets (for example, a newspaper), provide a venue for political “spin” – or interpretations of political events that convey advantage or disadvantage to one candidate or another. Mulhern’s campaign did almost no blogging during the County Commission cycle, but contributing to the blogs provided by the St. Petersburg Times, the Tampa Tribune, and the local weekly newspaper, became a routine occurrence during the Council race. While campaign websites often include a diary of observations and commentaries (often, confusingly, described as the candidate’s “blog”), these rarely offer opportunities for readers to provide input or respond to the statements. On the other hand, the “public” blogs, that is, the ones hosted by the newspapers, rarely have direct appearances by candidates. More often, candidates have supporters or operatives who participate in blogging on behalf of the campaign. During my work with Mulhern, I performed this role, criticizing Harrison, who Mulhern faced in the City Council race that followed her County Commission bid, making supportive statements regarding Mulhern, and generally sowing confusion and dissent regarding Harrison. It was in the so-called “blogosphere” that we attempted to make up the funding gap between Mulhern and Harrison, saying the things that we could not afford to say on television or the radio or in print ads.
Here is an example of the tenor of pre-election comments. First, the owner/host of the blog will post some story, either a new story that was collected first hand by the host or a story gleaned from some other source. Then, people comment on the original post. Respondents can often submit comments anonymously; when they post anonymously on this blog, their name/status simply does not appear: it just says “Posted by” with no name following. I submitted my remarks under the name “edseljoe”, which has been my personal email name for almost 20 years. The following exchange is fairly typical (drawn from The Buzz, the St. Petersburg Times political blog). My comment, a harsh satire of Harrison, appears about two thirds of the way down; respondent names follow the comments that they have authored. All the text is original and unedited.

The Buzz: Florida Politics News from the Times Staff
March 02, 2007
Saul-Sena Snubs Harrison
Long-time Tampa City Council member Linda Saul-Sena, who is unopposed in her bid for the at-large District 3 seat, has endorsed newcomer Mary Mulhern in the race for District 2, also a city-wide seat. Saul-Sena said she made the decision after hearing Mulhern speak last week at a candidate forum. “Her commitment to moving Tampa ahead as a sustainable and vibrant community with strong neighborhoods and a dynamic downtown mirror my vision,” Saul-Sena said. In other words, she believes Mulhern will be a strong advocate for better mass transit, a more walkable city and the environment. Mulhern is running against Shawn Harrison, who has served with Saul-Sena on the Council for the past eight years as the representative for north Tampa.
March 02, 2007 in Elections, Hillsborough | Permalink
Comments
Saul-Sena is a liberal Democrat. Mulhern is a liberal Democrat. That's all there is to it. I find it hard to believe she made up her mind last week.
Posted by: Boca Grande | March 02, 2007 at 04:34 PM
Of course, Saul-Sena *has* had years of up-close observation of Shawn Harrison. So she most likely *knows* what a waste of material he is.
Posted by: Mencken Jr | March 02, 2007 at 04:49 PM
Mary Mulhern is the best candidate for this city council seat!
Posted by: | March 02, 2007 at 06:21 PM
tax and spend liberal Democrats unite behind Mulhern. How much of our hard earned stormwaters fees did they waste on fancy office furniture and bldgs?
My Tampa Taxes are too high!!!! Harrison is right.
Posted by: | March 02, 2007 at 06:55 PM
South Tampa Stepford Democrats stick together. No surprise.
Posted by: Zhombre | March 02, 2007 at 07:14 PM
WOOHOO! Saul-Sena saw the man up-close and personal and says that the Invisible Man's a donut. He's the poster boy for Krispy Kreme. Wait, that's an insult to a fine doughnought establishment. Harrison's a double-dealing hypocrite who has and will simply pander. There's nothing there. No principles, no morals, just a jumped-up office jumper. That's it, folks.

edseljoe
Posted by: edseljoe | March 02, 2007 at 07:23 PM
Smart choice there, buddy. Mary Mulhern will do more for Tampa in one year of her tenure than the wasteful, invisible Shawn Who? could ever must ithese past eight years.
Go Mary Go!

Posted by: | March 02, 2007 at 08:04 PM
Shawn "privatization" Harrison is not the best choice for Tampa. Hard to believe he's been on the council for several years. Where's he been hiding and why haven't we heard of him before now?

Posted by: Susan S | March 02, 2007 at 10:19 PM
Shawn Who?

Posted by: | March 03, 2007 at 07:18 AM
Mary Mulhern for Tampa City Council! Mary will be a great council member for the people of Tampa, all the people of Tampa.
Way to Go Mary!

Posted by: | March 03, 2007 at 08:36 AM
Linda did a very brave bold move in supporting Mary. My hats are off to her. I am sure we will see more endorsements for Mary before Tuesday. I can't stand Shaun Harrison. He just makes me feel so uncomfortable everytime I see him in the tv ads.
mark :) http://www.myspace.com/brandon_pride
http://www.unbanned.org/

Posted by: Brandon Pride | March 03, 2007 at 11:30 AM
Mary Mulhern's opponent is as useless as a screen door on a submarine, and everybody knows it.

Posted by: Chris W | March 03, 2007 at 03:48 PM
It's no surprise that Mulhern has the most inane, mindless bunch of poster/supporters. What drivel. Can't you say anything substantive about her? Something besides pathetic cheerleading? GO MARY!!! YOU ARE THE BEST!!!! WE LOVE YOU!!!
You folks are as thought provoking as Mary's cardboard cutouts.

Posted by: | March 03, 2007 at 04:54 PM
I do hereby as a registered Republican do hereby endorse Mary Mulhern for Tamp City Council District 2.

Republicans for Mary Mulhern. . . I am a Republican but I am smart enough to call a spade a spade. Shawn find a real job!

Posted by: Republicans for Mary Mulhern | March 03, 2007 at 06:27 PM
hmmm.... Mary says "We need leaders who will respond to the needs of our neighborhoods, protect our quality of life, and work to make Tampa a more livable, sustainable and affordable city, one that cares for its citizens, celebrates its diversity and history and attracts high-paying jobs."

this is why hmmm... supports Mary, as Mary wants a future for the children and grandchildren of Tampa to come back home to, a place to raise their children. We need smart leaders who care of the future - not just their campaign donors. We need a smart leader who will guide the city of Tampa to be a continued place to raise families, where families will be able to afford living, where mass transit will become a viable option in traveling around the city; in the county. Mary Mulhern wants our bayways to come clean - its part of the beauty of this city.

Mary Mulhern for City Commission.
Go Mary Go!

190
oh yeah, least the poster above feels left out ...
We love you Mary! xoxoxoox
Posted by: wowser | March 03, 2007 at 06:37 PM
Mitch, Get back to work.
Posted by: Omar | March 03, 2007 at 07:45 PM
mulhern is becoming the next joe robinson, how many times do you all think she can run for office and lose?? i feel bad for her as she is going to lose again to a weak opponent nonetheless!!
Posted by: | March 04, 2007 at 08:18 AM
Mary Mulhern for Tampa City Council. period. Mary IS the smartest candidate in this race, Mary IS the only candidate in this race to have Tampa Trib, St Pete Times, The Sentinel, etc. endorsements.
Go Mary Go!
and oh yeah, so not to disappoint ...
We love you Mary and entrust you to represent us, we the people of Tampa, well!
Posted by: | March 04, 2007 at 09:01 AM
Linda Saul-Sena, The Trib, St.Pete Times, La Gaceta, Florida Sentinel all took the measure of Shawn's 8 years and endorsed MARY. READ THE TRIB'S INDICTMENT of Sh-yawn's failed leadership for yourselves:
http://www.tbo.com/news/opinion/editorials/MGBQ0X8WAYE.html
We need leaders who will move us out of developers' pockets and makes growth pay it's fair share. Your property taxes are high because they are subsidizing growth thanks to pawns like Shawn. Wake up!!

Go Mary Go!
Mary got my vote last week, my neighbor's the next day and oh yeah, several doors I knocked on yesterday - they had either voted already for Mary, or were planning on voting for Mary on Tuesday!
Go Mary Go!
as the poster above wishes ... We love you Mary!
Posted by: | March 04, 2007 at 12:44 PM
Something positive? Okay. Mary will push for the city to actually *fix* drainage problems in the city instead of fluffing up developers in between applications of hair mousse.
Posted by: Mencken Jr | March 04, 2007 at 11:19 PM
Mary will be a great addition to the city council! I look forward to her representing me on the city council!
Posted by: Dave Cutler | March 05, 2007 at 10:37 AM

The comments to this entry are closed.

The objective of my entry was to categorize him as a non-entity, a person who amounted to little in terms of his ability to do things for his constituency – a zero or donut ("doughnought" is an older spelling of the same term and literally means a zero or "nought" made of dough). Mulhern’s supporters appeared variously on the blog, with
both generally supportive comments and more specific defenses of her political positions and her capacity for undertaking the office.

And another example from The Buzz, this time from February 21, 2007. Again, format and syntax are from the original posts. Note the “Shawn Who” illustration leading the original post from the St. Petersburg Times host – that came from the Mulhern campaign. This is one of the examples of earned coverage that can alter the success a campaign has. Once the media begins repeating a compelling message issued from a campaign, the campaign then has a huge ally in the distribution and enculturation of the community as a whole. The purpose of the blogging, lest we forget, is not to directly influence voters, but to establish credibility among those politically active people who find reading political blogs interesting. Those interested parties are the ones who then may donate, canvass, or otherwise support a campaign. While some of the comments in these examples emanated from the Mulhern campaign (mine, for one obvious example) others came from outside it. After a while, if one is sufficiently diligent about blogging, the comments take on a general tone in favor of one candidate or another, rallying supporters and discomfiting the enemy.

My comments are at several points in the blog entry, mostly focusing on the lack of performance on the part of Harrison, which was our thematic objective.

The Buzz: Florida Politics News from the Times Staff
February 21, 2007
A Shot at Shawn
With less than two weeks to go before Tampa city elections, challenger Mary Mulhern is turning up the heat on sitting City Council member Shawn Harrison. Mulhern's latest mailer touts her endorsements by The Tampa Tribune and St. Petersburg Times and targets Harrison as "The Invisible Man." The graphic was also e-mailed to more than 1,000 people along with the first installment of a "True Life Adventure Series" that positions Mulhern as the "hero" who can "save the city" from Harrison and his developer allies. Harrison's response to the attack? "I'm running a positive campaign with positive messages," he said.

February 21, 2007 in Elections, Hillsborough, Political ads | Permalink

Comments

Mulhern is a Democratic activist who won't meet a tax increase she doesn't like. She is on the record opposing any tax reductions for overburdened Tampa homeowners, so her attack on Harrison, who wants lower taxes, is not a surprise.

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 04:23 PM

Now Shawn's true colors are shown. Just wait until shawn privatizes all of the city enterprises, especially wast hauling. Check his campaign finances, Waste Management is backing Shawn, can we say bribe

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 04:36 PM

I am so glad that the better candidate, Mary Mulhern, received the newspaper endorsements.

Sorry Shawnites,
It is time to hang up the empty suit!

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 04:50 PM

Ah, privatization...I heard Shawn sing its praises at a forum last week. You would think that Jeb's destruction of services at the state level, and George W.'s massive failures in the Iraq War due to privatization would have taught him a lesson.

Posted by: Susan S | February 21, 2007 at 04:56 PM

Shawn never met a development he didn't like. That's why they're bankrolling his campaign. After 8 years of do-nothing performance, New Tampa needs new leadership. And South Tampa needs the stormwater plan he opposed. Eight is Enough! Mary will stand up for the neighborhoods.

Posted by: Soggy Bottom Boy | February 21, 2007 at 05:12 PM
And for the record, MARY is NOT "on record as opposing any tax reduction for overburdened homeowners." She is on record advocating reform of an unfair property tax structure that burdens people inequitably.

Posted by: Soggy Bottom Boy | February 21, 2007 at 05:50 PM
Go Mary!

Posted by: Dave Cutler | February 21, 2007 at 08:09 PM
I thought it was really funny that both papers (including the more conservative Trib) kicked Harrison's balls up into his shirt pocket over the weekend.
We have a slew of people moving into this area every year, and all of them will need water, sewers, roads, schools, fire protection, police, and all of the other services you expect as part of living in a modern civilization.
Democrats understand the Golden Rules of economics:
1. There is no such thing as a free lunch.
2. You get what you pay for.

Shawn Harrison (like Jeb! Bush and other free-market fundamentalists) think you can get something close to a free lunch as long as you can stick someone else with the check. The federal government passed Medicaid obligations down to the states, and the state is passing mandates down to local government as fast as it can.

Posted by: Chris W | February 21, 2007 at 08:11 PM
Chris,
Do Democrats understand the Laffer curve?
I doubt it...

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 09:08 PM
Soggy Bottom
Tampa's problem is in it's priority-screwy mayor and worthless council.

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 09:09 PM
Tampa's City Council is absolutely worthless.
The fact that Tampa has an absolutely worthless mayor as well only compounds the issue.

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 09:11 PM
Hello, Tampa...This is relevance calling...I'm sorry, I just don't see us working out anymore. It's been nice all these years, but I'm moving out to the county.

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 09:12 PM
I've been asking ... Shawn who? the guy has offered NOTHING, adda, zip, zilch, zero input on the city council for how long now. And let's take a closer look at those funding his campaign - for what, a job that pays less than $40k?

Let's see ... developers, waste management insurance "agents" .... hmmm... why does Shawn Who hate Tampaians? Who does Shawn Who? owe?
Give 'em hell Mary Mulhern - the brightest, smartest candidate in this race.

Posted by: | February 21, 2007 at 09:34 PM
9:08 - Yes, we understand the Laffer curve. But it's a theory only marginally supported (if you'll pardon the pun) by empirical data, and contradicted in its most simplistic interpretation by the economic expansion during the Clinton years.
Like many economic theories, it's descriptive rather than predictive. It assumes that marginal tax rates are the primary driver of economic growth rather than innovation and larger megatrends. It also tries to foist off a simple curvilinear model onto messy data coming from an inherently recursive system.

For a satirical take on the Laffer curve, consult this article (http://www.everything2.net/index.pl?node_id=1225440).

Posted by: Chris W | February 21, 2007 at 10:03 PM
Chris
That's the beauty of economics - 9 times out of 10 its descriptive rather than predictive

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 06:40 AM
9:34
what makes Mary the "brightest"?
Is she more educated? If so, where did she go to school?
Is she more experienced? no, she's never held public office in this community
The basis for your statement is completely idiotic unless you can prove otherwise.
Both candidates have business experience, both candidates have a 4 year college degree
(Harrison I believe is an attorney, so that makes him more educated than Mulhern and
kills your "brighter" nonsense)
Mary ran an art institute - Shawn chairs the MPO
Does Mary have what it takes to make our transportation better - or does she think the
answer is to make roads pretty on the riverwalk or build trolley cars to nowhere like our
Mayor?
Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 06:48 AM
6:48 - Since when does law degree = bightness? Shawn chairs the MPO, yet offers no
leadership on getting growth to pay its fair share for overdue infrastructure: see Bruce B.
Downs. Mary's TRIB endorsement: "Harrison... has focused on traffic problems in his
district, though his results are hard to see. He talks about the need for light rail to meet
transportation needs, but he appears unwilling to commit to any funding plan. His support
for an unpopular proposal to build a beltway through the county's rural lands also is
troubling.
Even more troubling is his past indifference to flooding problems in south Tampa. He
opposed a modest stormwater fee to repair the city's crumbling infrastructure. Instead, he
adopted a simplistic "no new fee" attitude while offering no concrete alternatives for
solving the problem."
Shawn is too deep in developer's pockets. Mary has the courage and the independence to
act in the public interest. Read it for yourself:
http://www.tbo.com/news/opinion/editorials/MGBQ0X8WAYE.html
Posted by: Nathan Wiser | February 22, 2007 at 09:07 AM
Soggy Bottom. You say Mulhern is "NOT on record as opposing any tax reduction for
overburdened homeowners. She is on record advocating reform of an unfair property tax
structure that burdens people inequitably." What gibberish!!! We are looking for tax cuts.
Mulhern just wants to distribute higher taxes more fairly.
I wonder if Shawn uses Kevin White's clothing consultant for his empty suits.
Posted by: Boca Grande | February 22, 2007 at 09:48 AM
Boca, if you're really looking for lower property taxes then you need to get the
(Republican) legislature change state law to require properties to be valued at "current
use" instead of "highest and best use". Then you need to talk to the (Republican) property
appraiser about lowering the assessment on your property.
I think you're selling Tampa residents short, though. We realize that services cost money,
and that money has to come from somewhere. We just want that money to be collected
fairly, so we're not paying a buttload more than our neighbors; nobody likes being stuck
with the check.
We'd also like to declare a moratorium on the Dick Greco "edifice complex" that infects
elected officials. Please just keep the schools in shape, pay the teachers more (and respect
them more), keep the firemen and police happy, fix the roads, time the traffic lights
better, and we're happy.
Mary is a much better candidate because she's actually from Tampa, not "New Tampa".
Shawn represents people who are satisfied (for example) to send their sewage down old
pipes in Tampa but don't want to pay increased stormwater fees to cover the cost of
fixing and upgrading pipes that weren't built for that much new sewage. It's not surprising
that he's the way he is; he can't help it. He's a parochial candidate from a suburb that
would like to be city but doesn't want to pay what it really costs.
Posted by: Chris W | February 22, 2007 at 10:56 AM
That's simply not true, Boca Grande. Mary looked at the joke of a tax cut that the Invisible Man offered the city of Tampa last summer (as a blatant attempt to pander to conservative voters) and said - I think the people of Tampa need REAL tax relief. Face it, the Invisible Man doesn't know how to give a responsible tax cut so he made a gesture. Let's hope the voters of Tampa show him a gesture in return.

Edseljoe
Posted by: edseljoe | February 22, 2007 at 10:56 AM
AND BY THE WAY...
The Laffer Curve is the most appropriately named concept in economics. It's a laugh. Every time a conservative gives a tax cut to the top of the income pyramid, we do not hit the jack pot. Instead, they hide the money in tax-proof investments and then export our jobs overseas.

George Bush had it right - it's Voodoo economics. Let's give the tax cuts to working people, and I mean NOW. Working people put all their cash right back into the local economy. They are the engine of economic growth.

So you want to talk about economics?

Edseljoe
Posted by: edseljoe | February 22, 2007 at 10:59 AM
If you want higher property taxes, vote for Mary Mulhern for Tampa City Council.

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 11:09 AM
So you may say, anonymous poster, but do you have any evidence or are you just keeping your keyboard in use?

Mary has said on several occasions, both during the County Commission race and now, that she wants REAL tax relief, not an empty gesture. That's certainly more than the Invisible Man has been willing to do.

Edseljoe
Posted by: edseljoe | February 22, 2007 at 12:08 PM
Okay, am I the only one that finds it interesting that Mulhern has hired the guy who ran Charlie Justice's ridiculous Superman, comic book themed campaign (which he won -- barely -- in spite of, not because of), and now she too is running a comic-bookish, "hero" campaign?

Marketing lessons learned from professional wrestling do not necessarily translate to political campaigns...

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 02:04 PM
Mitch Kates is going to head up a number of successful campaigns before he gets bored of politics. Charlie Justice won because of Mitch's committment to counterpunching when Kim Whatshername insisted on going negative.

Berfield was backed by huge stacks of cash. And she still lost to Justice.

I'd say that means Kates is a winner.

Edseljoe
Posted by: edseljoe | February 22, 2007 at 03:56 PM
The "Shawn Who" campaign made me want to find out more. So I decided to find out just exactly who the Shawn was...and then when I read up on his platform, and then Mulhern's...I decided to vote for Shawn.

Congrats Mulhern for generating interest in Shawn

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 07:54 PM
Kates is an idiot who hitch his wagon to a winner. Hell, Kim could have won CJ's campaign for him.

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 08:35 PM
6:48 - you my dear evidently haven't spoken with Mary - if you had you'd know - mary does the research, Mary digs deep to find solutions to problems, and Mary asks and gets feedback from homeowners, renters, snowbirds, students, etc.
When was the last time Shawn Who? asked anyone for their idea, other than a developer of how much they'd like to contribute for a job that pays less than $40k.

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 09:40 PM

Kates - a winner in my book. He chooses to work for people with integrity, gives his job everything AND he's a 'hoot too!

Welcome to Tampa Mitch and I'm hoping that you stay around for a long time.

Posted by: | February 22, 2007 at 10:09 PM

What a shock... another anonymous poster for The Invisible Man!

How can you do research on a guy with no real record? Shawn has had numerous opportunities to increase the transparency and accessibility of the City Council and he's never done it. By contrast, the County Commission has a relatively easy-to-use system for looking at the behavior of the body. If the Invisible Man is so proud of his record, why hasn't he made more of it available?

edseljoe

Posted by: edseljoe | February 23, 2007 at 09:50 AM

edseljoe, I bet Shawn thought he'd just coast into office without having a real race on his hands. You can see he isn't prepared at all.

Posted by: Chris W | February 23, 2007 at 05:54 PM

You can also see his financial reports online. There are some odd expenses, including $2410 for a "residential map of the district" when a precinct map costs less than $10 down at the supervisor's office and you can see which precincts are in what district for free on the supervisor's web site. That plus a $1.50 felt-tip marker will get you a residential map of the district.

Some fiscal conservative, huh?

Posted by: Chris W | February 23, 2007 at 05:57 PM

Um, should I even mention the fact that Shawn uses the same image consulting firm (according to his financial expenditure form) that did the PR work for disgraced Congressman (and page harasser) Mark Foley? The Invisible Man has spent thousands on them... Should I mention that?

Probably not.

edseljoe

Posted by: edseljoe | February 23, 2007 at 10:06 PM

I don't know what his last name is or who he supports... and I definitely don't want to know what's in your mouth.

Posted by: | February 23, 2007 at 10:42 PM

edseljoe, the Trib and the Times had it right - he's a lightweight.

Posted by: Chris W | February 24, 2007 at 09:10 AM

I have heard both candidates speak before on all issues, and Mr. Harrison seemed like he did not like me very much because he did not approve of my lifestyle. So I told him to go F himself, and I am voting for Mary who is more open minded than he is.

Mark Ferguson

http://www.myspace.com/brandon_pride

Posted by: Brandon Pride | February 25, 2007 at 02:58 PM

I have lived in Terrace Park for 16 years. Born in the city of Tampa. Mr Harrison came to our HOA meeting and made many promises which he has not kept a one. Our area has less now than ever in the past. One sidewalk in the time on city council, no Bus Stop shelters for Hart Lines and it seem that he can prejudge you in a minute. So vote on 6 March 2007.

Posted by: Russell Howell | March 04, 2007 at 04:57 PM

Some of the posters on this blog discuss the qualifications of candidates, but this is not, perhaps, the very best forum for that kind of information. Both Mulhern and
Harrison maintained web pages with their resumes. Additionally, Harrison established a presence on the public access encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org. Rather, the objective of the blog war is to create a general ideological tone, rather than the elucidation of particular facts. Although blogs do have the potential to democratize the dissemination of information, they clearly lack much of the responsible fact checking that one associates with more established media. Instead, bloggers are policed, essentially, by only two forces – first, the blog’s owners, who may or may not allow certain kinds of information to be posted. For example, they may have a standard policy regarding profanity on the blog. The other force is the power of the mob in the form of the other political operatives and interested parties who leap into the fray.

Another natural outgrowth of the Internet for political campaigns is, of course, email. For the cost of a monthly email connection, campaigns (including Mulhern’s) can access voters, sending them announcements about the campaign or requesting money or volunteers. On the downside, mass emails are even more quickly deleted than paper junk mail is thrown in the trash. Even ardent supporters can simply ignore the campaign’s email, especially if they feel that is simply another request for money.

The following was a campaign email that we distributed to advertise Mary Mulhern’s Women in Politics event (originally emailed on February 16, 2007 as a last-minute reminder):

Hello Friends of Mary!!!

This is a reminder that tomorrow night- Saturday Feb. 17th from 4:30-7:00pm

Women in Politics with Special Guest Jennifer Granholm- Governor of Michigan will be held in honor of Mary Mulhern- candidate for Tampa City Council District 2- Citywide

The event will be at the home of Janet Rifkin 5035 San Miguel Street Tampa
Rumor alert...Looks like our own CFO- Alex Sink will also be in attendance!!!
Please see attached invite. We hope to see you there!!!

5.2.2 Outdoor advertising and Personal Appearances

The most common form of campaign advertisement is the standard yard sign. Each sign is typically 18” by 24” and has a very simple, easy-to-read design. They are called yard signs because they are typically placed in a supporter’s front yard, a visible symbol of the household’s support of a candidate. While canvassing neighborhoods, we always tried to ask if the household would post a yard sign with Mulhern’s logo on it. We would then post the sign for them if they said yes. Some households took this to extremes, posting either multiple signs for individual candidates or, alternatively, a great variety of signs for the many candidates that they supported. However, most households simply declined to post yard signs. Yard signs have multiple functions, however. They can be used during campaign visibility events (as described in the vignette at the
beginning of the setting chapter). The size of the typical yard sign makes them easy to
carry or wave and they are easy to read from a distance.

Yard signs can also be used on Election Day at the various polling places. While
officers for municipal Code Enforcement are often under orders to remove campaign
signs that are posted inappropriately, polling places are exempted from this. Voting
actually begins some time prior to Election Day in Florida, through a mechanism called
“Early Voting.” Yard signs may be placed in those early voting locations as soon as they
are opened, and, of course, they can be placed on private property at any time (unless the
community has a restriction on public advertisements, like some deed-restricted
communities or some trailer parks). Sometimes, a sign is placed on private property
without the knowledge of the property owner. Signs placed on a vacant lot, for example,
can go unmolested for weeks assuming they are not noticed by members of opposing
campaigns who may remove such signs with the same impunity. Signs placed on public
property are summarily removed by Code Enforcement officers. However, the delay
between when a sign is placed and when it is removed is often great enough to justify
continuous placement and replacement of the inexpensive yard signs. The resulting
guerilla war of sign placement is a standard feature of campaign season. If a three dollar
sign can be placed in a commandingly visible location for a few days, it is a worthwhile
investment of campaign resources to put it out, even if the sign itself is thrown away by
an irate property owner or Code Enforcement a few hours later. And, of course, signs
placed on the night before Election Day are often not removed until after the contest has
been decided, meaning that there is a tremendous incentive to put signs out in riotous
abundance. Election Day is often very colorful indeed as campaign workers scramble
around the district, placing signs in as many public locations as possible, often illegally placing them on private property or on public rights-of-way. Some campaigns hire last-minute sign placers to crisscross the city immediately prior to the campaign. Hiring a crew of workers to do such a task was traditionally a way for campaigns to pass out rewards to backers in exchange for guaranteed support.

Of course, yard signs are not the only kind of outdoor advertisement. There are also outdoor ads. Outdoor ads include billboards, which come in various sizes based on the number of sheets of printed material are involved in creating the overall sign. Some outdoor ads include: the standard roadside 30-sheet (each image on a billboard is composed of multiple posters, called sheets that form the pieces of the picture): the smaller 8-sheet (more common in residential areas); the sides of city busses, taxis, and trolley cars; the gargantuan “bulletin” billboard (larger than the 30-sheet); and numerous other forms of public advertising. Ferlita’s campaign was able to afford billboards, including some in very public locations; Mulhern’s was not. For a few weeks prior to the primary, Ferlita had a bulletin-style billboard perched high above the intersection of I-275 and I-4, an extremely busy highway interchange, used by hundreds of thousands of commuters every day. Ferlita’s campaign spent $112,345.60 on services, including billboards, produced by Strategic Solutions of Tampa, LLC, which included almost $30,000 on specifically billboard-related charges.

Still another form of outdoor advertisement is called “campaign visibility.” During a campaign visibility event, volunteers and/or the candidate take up signs and wave at passing motorists and pedestrians, as I described during the vignette at the beginning of the setting section as well as, to a lesser extent, the beginning of this section.
Campain visibility is inexpensive in terms of dollars – you just grab some yard signs (or in the case of the Mulhern campaign, the stand-up “Marys”) and head for a public location where you’re likely to see lots of motorists. It can be difficult to gauge response to campaign visibility. Many cars pass quickly and few respond in a way that can be easily interpreted. Even more obvious signs that a driver has noticed you (honking, various kinds of hand-waving) are subject to multiple interpretations. Some people honk when they support a candidate, others honk when they want to show disapproval. Still, campaign visibility events were often an emotional high for campaign volunteers. After a visibility event, workers for the Mulhern campaign often reported feeling good about the progress of the campaign. Campaign visibility events usually lasted about two hours.

Another kind of public campaign activity is the personal appearance, either as a member of a public candidate forum or as the operator of a booth or table at some kind of public event. Mulhern attended several candidate forums. Local campaign forums were, typically, lightly attended events. Local elections are not a huge draw under the best of circumstances and few voters, seemingly, wanted to interrupt their routine to attend a public discussion of politics. On several occasions, there were more campaign workers and candidates in a room than there would be actual voters (as you can see from the vignette at the start of this chapter)! There were some exceptions. For example, a local gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender group sponsored a candidate forum in a renascent middle-class neighborhood. Perhaps two-hundred potential voters attended. However, there were more than just local candidates on the dais. Some state and even one or two national-level candidates were in attendance and perhaps it was this one-stop character that made it more attractive for voters.
Another kind of personal appearance is just attending some event and mingling in the crowd. Even if a candidate has not been invited to speak to a crowd, any assembly of potential voters can prove to be a very attractive draw. Mulhern attended various union meetings, not with the intention of addressing the group but, rather, to simply take advantage of the opportunity to speak to the union membership on a one-to-one basis. While the candidate forum highlights everyone on the dais, this other kind of personal appearance, informally called “schmoozing”, requires a different sort of skill-set. Some candidates give rousing speeches from the podium but are incapable of being personable off stage. Some are the opposite, incapable of stirring a crowd but very charismatic up close. Many had the ability to do either, often with little notice, capitalizing on any opportunity they could get to “touch” a voter.

Still another form of outdoor activity is, perhaps, the oldest form of campaign advertisement: the previously mentioned door-to-door canvass. When Mulhern would speak to other, more experienced candidates, the question they always asked was: “Are you walking?” In other words, they wanted to know if she was going door-to-door, talking to every resident in her district. Naturally, in large cities like Tampa, it is very difficult, if not impossible to speak to every resident. This is another instance where the Democratic VAN File (Voter Activation Network File), or its Republican equivalent, can have a huge impact on the campaign. Candidates and their volunteers can target specific doors in specific neighborhoods, with the voter database as a guide.

Canvassing in Tampa, Florida in the summer leading up to Election Day in November is a hot, tiresome activity. Summer heat and thick humidity can wilt even the spunkiest campaign worker. Re-hydration is a critical element to mounting a canvassing
operation. Campaign workers (and the candidate) fan out over an area, and begin knocking on the targeted doors (as I discussed in the vignette at the beginning of the Methods chapter). Since the objective is to “touch” the voter several times, often, the resident of the targeted door has heard of the candidate and already has an opinion about his or her chances for success.

The key to successful canvassing is not speaking but listening. In many cases, the residents want a chance to vent about the neighborhood, about perceived slights or the indifference of municipal government, and other issues. On at least two occasions, residents asked Mulhern, who was, remember, not an office holder, to undertake certain very specific repairs in their community. One person wanted Mulhern to do something about a reputed drug den, another wanted her to do something about the specific storm-drain situation on their block. Mulhern carefully noted their names, addresses, phone numbers, and a brief summary of the problem, then called her friends in city and county government to ask about what could be done. Canvassing is, perhaps, the most personal kind of contact that a voter can get with the campaign. Each door represents a chance for the campaign to talk about issues important to the community, as well as to distribute campaign literature.

Some houses have posted signs indicating that they do not wish to receive any solicitors at their door. For obvious reasons, those houses are not canvassed. Other houses post signs warning of bad dogs, which is a significant disincentive for a walking campaign worker not to approach. During the 2006 election cycle, a possibly apocryphal story circulated about a canvasser who had been mauled by a pit bull while imprudently ignoring a bad dog sign. I never ignored them. However, not all dog owners posted such
signs. One of the campaign workers affiliated with Mulhern’s campaign made a practice of shaking the gate before entering someone’s yard. This action was intended to flush out any resident canines so that there were no surprises upon entry.

One key limitation of the canvass is that it is, not surprisingly, time consuming. Walking is slow, steady work and a practical evaluation of costs and benefits must be undertaken before committing to walk in a neighborhood. If the neighborhood, for example, is 90% Republican, the remaining 10% of the voters may be too sparsely sprinkled to justify walking the neighborhood. The houses in at least one neighborhood, in the southern portion of the county, were simply spread too far apart for us to walk the area. We gathered that just to walk from one relatively isolated house to the next would take ten or fifteen minutes; in some cases in that area, driving would be necessary just to go from one address to the next closest. At that rate, hours of canvassing would result in only a few homes visited, an inefficient method of “touching” the electorate.

Related to canvassing but without the attention to detail is the “literature drop.” This entails assembling campaign workers and driving to a neighborhood, like a canvassing session, but with the objective being to drop off campaign literature (described below) at as many houses as possible. Literature drops go very fast, as campaign workers walk from one house to the next, shoving fliers or palm cards (described below) into door jambs. It is against the law to place materials that are not distributed by the Postal Service in a mailbox; fliers or palm cards left in a mailbox are routinely mailed back to the campaign, marked “postage due.”
5.2.3 Paper Advertisements and Campaign Literature

Figure 7: Rose Ferlita's campaign tri-fold pamphlet (FRONT/Outside)

Figure 8: Rose Ferlita pamphlet (BACK/Inside)

Of course one key element in all this is the creation of campaign literature.

Mulhern, a graphic designer married to an advertising executive, understood the need for
visually appealing campaign materials. All of the campaign’s images (the stand-up Marys as well as the yard signs and palm cards) were created by Mulhern; many of the campaign’s slogans and catch-phrases were created by Mulhern’s husband. In fact, one early problem that I encountered in my work with the campaign was that it became clear immediately that my talents as a writer/wordsmith, were less useful to this particular campaign than they would have been to other campaigns. My skills as a researcher and synthesizer of information were considered much more useful, although that was not what I had hoped to do for the campaign.

Consider the fundamental criteria for successful campaign materials: they have to portray the candidate in a positive light; alternatively, they can portray the candidate’s opponent in a less than flattering light. Regardless of what course is chosen, the message must be succinct and apparently unambiguous, yet flexible enough that a candidate may make alterations in the field without causing voters to perceive hypocrisy. Mulhern’s campaign materials went through some evolutions during the election cycle. Her first palm card was a plain red, white, and blue motif that emphasized her desire to see growth pay for itself. After some recommendations from friends as well as some time spent by Mulhern redesigning the palm card, creating a cobalt blue motif, featuring her logo and some of her campaign principles on one side, a friendly image of the candidate in the “stand-up Mary” pose on the other side.

A palm card is a pretty standard campaign document. It is approximately the size of one-third to one-half of a sheet of 8½” by 11” paper. Each palm card functions as a miniature campaign poster/campaign platform. Often, candidates use it as a resume, as well. Kevin White, for example, who ran for County Commission during the same cycle
as Mary Mulhern, devoted one third of one side of his palm card to highlighting his career milestones. However, most candidates use the palm card as campaign literature, detailing either general principles or specific agenda items that they would like to undertake if elected. The purpose of the palm card is to act as a calling card during literature drops, as a conversation starter during the canvass, and as a reminder to the voter that the elections are coming and that the candidate depicted is deserving of the voter’s support on Election Day.

The procedure for delivering a palm card varies. At a candidate forum, sometimes a table is established for the dissemination of literature. Typically, this is a single table placed somewhere near the entrance, but some forums that focus on one-on-one time with candidates emphasize individual tables for each candidate and his or her support staff. I recall one candidate forum sponsored by a local business group, where the candidates were required to stay at their table, and wait to receive a cocktail party crowd, as though they were an extension of the nearby buffet and open bar. The power relationship in that context seemed evident in that instant: candidates are servants rather than authorities. The attendees were supposed to start at one end of an arc around the room, visiting each candidate in turn, and then finishing at the buffet and bar. Of course, a traffic jam immediately occurred and the crowd, fresh from work, simply bypassed the line of candidate tables and went straight to the bar. Finally, drinks in hands, they returned to see what the candidates had to say. Many candidates responded with good humor, some left discretely.

Another technique for distributing materials is the literature (or “lit”) drop. Although this technique is less reliable than the actual face-to-face canvass, it is a
common enough technique. Candidates or their representatives simply take a palm-card or flier and drop it on the doorstep of a given house. The hope is that the occupant will see this scrap of paper and do something other than simply throw it away. For obvious reasons, it’s hard to say what actually gets done with the fliers once the dropper has moved on. There is at least one good reason for doing this – volume. While a canvasser can only knock and talk to so many people, he or she can easily drop many times that much literature in a neighborhood. If the modern canvass, aided by computer databases and coordination with other groups, is targeted contact with a given neighborhood, lit dropping is the scattergun approach. It’s the kind of mass communicating that you can do if you don’t have money to put a billboard in a neighborhood.

Another technique often used in campaigns is direct mail, which combines the speed of a lit drop with the targeted access afforded by the VAN-file directed canvass where canvassers are told to knock on particular doors based on the voting habits of the occupants. As I mentioned previously, the Republicans not only have the voting information, they also have somewhat detailed information about other aspects of the person’s life, as is chronicled in the book by a former Republican direct mail specialist (Viguerie 2004). Using this technique, the voting information can be cross-referenced with subscription lists for certain magazines. Viguerie’s work in this area is commonly regarded as one of the cornerstones of the campaign operation of national Republican candidates. A candidate only has to identify a select portion of the electorate and then design some campaign literature that, theoretically, should appeal to the group. To give a rough sense of the effectiveness of this technique, consider: a person who subscribes to handgun magazines and is a registered Republican receives a direct mail piece identifying
candidate A as an ardent hunter and candidate B as a craven gun-control advocate. This is the ideological combat in a very straightforward way. The objective is to create an interpretation of reality that can appeal to certain voters, thus enabling the candidate to win in the voting booth.

Sometimes, this practice can backfire. In her primary election, Rose Ferlita was unfairly slandered by one of her Republican opponents, who used direct mail to make off-putting allegations. Swanson stated in his direct mail fliers that Ferlita was friendly with the politically organized gay and lesbian community. The implication was clear: Ferlita, argued Swanson’s fliers, is not a conservative, because she associates with gays and lesbians. The tone and the content of the message were cited as reasons why the local newspapers endorsed Ferlita over that particular opponent. The cross referencing of campaign information with other kinds of information can be tabulated by the campaign, or information can be amassed through the use of specialist direct mail agencies, that keep mailing list information for sale to advertisers and, naturally, political candidates. Needless to say, the campaign with the resources to afford the services of a mailing list company or the internal human and technological resources necessary to create such a list is at an advantage.

5.2.4 Other resources in the political process

Retaining control of power is, of course, much easier than wresting power from those that hold it. The maintenance of power relationships takes several forms, some more overt than others. One form of the subtle power within the political arena that is used in a hegemonic fashion is the institutional use of informational or symbolic or ideological power to rationalize or minimize decisions that might be regarded as running
contrary to the interests of the electorate. During the County Commission race (and indeed, in the City Council race), the Mulhern campaign had trouble accessing information about her opponent’s voting record during her tenure on the Tampa City Council. While the institutional forces that were at play may not have been installed by Ferlita, she certainly benefited from them and the fact that, during her stay on the Council, she did nothing to alter them (nor did any other sitting City Council member) is a fair indication of the degree to which the arrangements benefit the incumbents. That advantage can be described as one form of hegemony – the “offstage rumblings” of civil society intruding in the realm of political society, or vice versa (Smith 2004:219).

Hegemony does not amount, entirely, to this intrusion, but it is a manifestation of the way in which information control becomes institutionalized, and then becomes a manner in itself for preserving power relationships.

Specifically, what I’m addressing is the issue of public records. Florida’s laws regarding this matter are called the “Government-in-the-Sunshine” laws (Florida Office of the Attorney General 2007). Originally drafted in the middle of the 1960’s as a means of creating government transparency, the actual implementation of those laws, also known colloquially as the “Sunshine Law,” has created a moderately ambiguous situation which bears some exploration. As a quick example of this, consider the absence of history regarding the law on the Attorney General’s website, which is the state’s most public repository of information on the subject. While the guide to the law includes case law (arranged alphabetically by plaintiff rather than chronologically – this is significant) and explanations regarding the application of the law, there is no official history of the law. The absence of the history is, of course, a political expediency. Inclusion of a
historical narrative (beyond the baldest of descriptions of the origin of the legislation) would only serve to acknowledge the fact that the law itself is a contestable piece of the historical document. In other words, the obscurity of the history of the document serves to further institutionalize it, creating a sense that the document is, was, and always will be the only way to conduct business in the state with regard to transparency of the political/legal process. If the law were widely associated with a particular political agenda (if, for example, it had been enacted during a Democratic or Republican-controlled legislative era, it would be understood in that context, as a tool enacted by one side or the other, rather than as an unquestionable element of the institution. If hegemony is about the control of history, then the Attorney General’s website and its treatment of the “Sunshine Law” are exhibit A in the deployment of hegemonic control over information and its use to buttress power relationships.

The law comprises two necessary components: regulation of meetings of government officials and access and availability of public documents (Parts I and II of the document, ibid.). Part I details the requirements necessary for a meeting of government officials to occur. Basically, elected officials, at any level, are not allowed to meet one another without first giving public notice and making accommodation for members of the public to actually attend. While this component of the law is nominally intended to provide the public with opportunities for participation in the governmental process, as a practical matter it does not do so in all cases. Announcements of public meetings can be posted in comparatively obscure venues for public consideration. The municipal government of Temple Terrace, Tampa’s northeastern neighbor, for example, posts announcements of public meetings on signs beside major thoroughfares. Although this
does comply with the letter of the public meeting Part of the Sunshine law, it can be difficult to decipher a public notice in comparatively small print on an unobtrusive roadside sign, while driving by at 40 miles per hour. Another section of this Part of the law stipulates that public meetings should keep minutes and that the minutes of those meetings are then to be handled as a government document and, thus, are covered in the Sunshine Law’s next major section.

Part II of the law covers the availability of government documents and it is this situation that constitutes a fascinating example of the hegemonic maintenance of political power in the hands of incumbent politicians. The Sunshine Law stipulates that all documents handled by governmental agencies that are not subject to specific privacy arrangements be made available to the public. Examples of exempted documents could include medical records, certain kinds of juvenile criminal records, and other, similarly sensitive documents. This section of the law, again, nominally creates a situation where accountability is held to the highest standard and information is available for the asking. However, in reality, it can create the opposite effect.

During the campaign, Mulhern wanted to acquire knowledge of Ferlita’s voting record. As a series of public decisions, undertaken at public meetings, with officially kept minutes, banked on a publicly accessible website, one would think that nothing could be simpler. One imagines a long list of legislation considered and either passed or rejected, with an integrated list of the ways in which individual councilmen and councilwomen voted. However, what is actually there is two marginally related streams of information that give confusing, conflicting, and time-displaced accounts of City Council business.
To understand why, let us follow the fictional path of a zoning request put before the board. Imagine a small business owner. The success of her business has given her the wherewithal to expand her store and she wants to acquire a neighboring piece of land. Unfortunately, that neighboring piece of land is zoned as residential land, rather than the commercial designation she would need to expand. Although no one has lived on that piece of property for many years and the owner and neighbors have all indicated that they find the expansion of her business agreeable, she must request a zoning change for the property. The necessary forms are filed, a case number is assigned to the proposed legislation, a hearing is set, and the small business owner assembles some supporters to take the day off and attend the City Council meeting. Arriving at City Hall, she herds her supporters into the chambers of the council and approaches the podium when called to do so. She explains her situation, her supporters (and detractors) speak, and the Council makes a decision. However, the decision is not the final, ultimate choice on the matter. Rather, it is simply a vote to begin deciding the matter, which must then be approved by a majority of Council members on subsequent meetings. These subsequent meetings are nominally intended to give the Council time to consider the request and to give the public an opportunity to make their wishes felt regarding the proposed legislation. In reality, the effect they have is to divorce the actual decision from the initial public hearing wherein the facts of the case are actually presented. While the initial public hearing might make reference to the name of the property involved in the zoning change, subsequent references will allude only to an agenda item number in a large set of numbered government documents.
Ironically coupled with this procedural disjuncture created, in part, by Part I of the Sunshine Law, is the overwhelming mass of government documents that are actually provided as a result of Part II of the Sunshine Law. In an effort nominally intended to expand public access to government documents, every agenda, every item, every memorandum is made available as a document. The actual minutes of the meeting are the more-or-less word for word transcripts created as the Closed Caption stream during the televised broadcast of the meetings. Those transcriptions, written very quickly while the actual meetings are broadcast live on television, often include inadvertent misspellings and the sort of malapropisms that occur when a document spell-checker is allowed unfettered editorial control of a document. Those documents are available online as regular word-processing documents and are accessible with a simple site-based search engine. However, consider the limitations of this system: Should you desire a document related to Bearss Avenue, a major thoroughfare in the northern portion of Hillsborough County, for example, you would have to search the transcripts for any reference to “bears” (or “bares”) which is the common pronunciation of the word and, of course, a common noun that would be the first choice of any hyper-efficient spell-checking software.

Other documents, like application forms and legal memoranda are made available in the commonly available Adobe Acrobat format (typically called “.pdf files”). Adobe Acrobat documents would, at first, seem ideal for this kind of public document availability. They are essentially digital images of real-life documents, viewable on any computer equipped with the free reader software. They cannot be modified by the reader and they, therefore, constitute the closest thing to a real document that can easily be made
available. Further, the hundreds of pages of documents generated by each weekly meeting of the City Council, are very easily redistributed, far more easily than having a clerk detailed to certifying the validity of the request and then copying the requested document. However, although Adobe does make a version of its proprietary software that allows you to upload searchable documents – the text of documents being made searchable by scanning it in, word-for-word using text-recognition software, prior to uploading the formatted document – the City of Tampa does not take this precaution, meaning that the agenda plus supporting documents for each session are, essentially, an undifferentiated pile of loosely assembled materials, snapshots of the original documents, that defy casual or speedy examination.

Let’s return to the example of our small business owner. So, having submitted all the paperwork, and having given her initial presentation, her project becomes an agenda item for subsequent consideration. At the appointed time, subsequent hearings will occur, accompanied by a vote, often with little explanation regarding the content of what is, after all, just one of hundreds of transactions that the council undertakes. Most of the projects considered by the Council are, like our fictional small business owner, perfectly unobjectionable and, therefore, need no special attention. A quick yea-or-nay vote is conducted and the results of the vote are recorded. On many occasions, the votes of specific council members are not noted. In other words, Council members might vote 4-3 but there would not, in many cases, be a record as to who voted which way. In any case, the decision is recorded for digital posterity, the documents are filed for public access and the letter of the Sunshine Law has been followed.
While newspapers are, of course, able to act as a check on the institutional memory of the City Council, they do not, in fact, perform this task, for a few reasons. First, newspapers and television news programs are in the business of selling advertising and subscriptions. This stuff is boring, by any standard. The legal permission to change the height of a sign by five feet is scarcely the sort of attention grabbing material that sells newspapers, despite the profound effect that the permission might have on the interested parties. Second, newspapers simply cannot cover every decision made by the Council. Sometimes, dozens of decisions are made each session, very quickly, as Council members resolve issues from previous sessions. Unless the issue is an important one, affecting many area residents, newspapers and TV news programs have other things they would rather share with their consumers.

And yet, it does not take a particularly paranoid person to imagine situations where the very volume of information, the vast quantities of transcripts, memoranda, and agendas could, in itself, obscure the actual decision-making process. Short of watching the City Council hearings, either in person or on video tape, with a copy of that day’s agenda and supporting documents in hand (which supporting documents are readily available after a given day’s activities, but not during), the process can be almost inscrutable. Certainly, my experience, attempting to disentangle the decision-making process in an effort to make allegations against Ferlita and Harrison, was a frustrating one. I attempted to find just one case that was easily understood, comparing television transcript, with the nominally associated documents and I was unable to do so.

The net effect of all of this is to provide a huge edge in terms of ideational domains (a la Kurtz 2001: 35-38) of power to the incumbent politician. It is almost too
easy for an incumbent to lay claim to some great work (symbolic or ideological resources) that was done while simultaneously denying involvement in some perfidious undertaking (with the denial occurring as a result of the incumbent’s control of the informational resources). It does not even require any great feat of mendacity to pull it off. All a candidate has to do is keep a low profile between elections and then “stand on their record” during the campaign season. The documents, available in their multitudes, serve as a glamorous shield. Their very availability gives the verisimilitude of openness and honesty while acting as camouflage for anything that is problematic. I hasten to point out that I am by no means suggesting that such subterfuge is willfully or even consciously undertaken. One can comply with the system with a completely clear conscience, scarcely aware of the power that compliance actually extends.

Nor do I mean to suggest in any way that the system has been generated with the intention of obscuring the relationship between decisions, consequences, and individual politicians. Quite the contrary. Rather, as Smith argues, the various institutions of a society “each have their own very particular histories from one social formation to another” (2004:219). Hegemony is not conspiracy, but it is an accretion of power, often mounted through the accumulation of these advantages.

In the first race, Ferlita took full advantage of this edge, laying claim to being honest, honorable, and looking out for the people. Review, for example, the Ferlita pamphlet depicted in the figures at the beginning of the section of chapter five on paper advertisements. Challenged on specifics, at candidate forums, for example, her standard response was to suggest that for every seeming impropriety, there were many transactions that were utterly without blemish. I am by no means suggesting that Ferlita was engaged
in any duplicity here. However, the fact that the very mechanism intended to promote honesty is fundamentally flawed means that her claims to honesty cannot be subjected to scrutiny. She was able to use the complexities of the information system and the absence of overt criticism of her career as a politician as a bolster to her qualifications as a politician.

By contrast, in the second race, Shawn Harrison bore some similarity to Ferlita (both were eight year veterans of City Council, both were professionals, both were heavily backed financially by Republican funding sources), completely failed to leverage his ambiguous record for personal advancement. In fact, Mulhern’s “Invisible Man” ad campaign (a symbolic resource) drew some attention to Harrison’s seeming inaction during his eight-year tenure on City Council. You can see that ad in the section, above, about electronic campaign materials. The ads consisted of an empty suit juxtaposed with the problems that faced city council during Harrison’s tenure with that body. The implication was that he had accomplished nothing other than looking electable. The ads banked on the basic mistrust that voters have for incumbents by accusing him of being a do-nothing City Councilman. This accusation is all too easy to level because of the invisibility of Council operations. Harrison failed to respond adequately to the charge and this contributed in some small part to his demise as a candidate. In other words, in the second race, the Mulhern campaign benefited from a systemic contradiction that is a flaw within the hegemonic formation.
5.3 Methods and Ethnography: Conclusion

This brief treatment of the subject of one particular campaign has been an attempt to examine the subject from two different directions. The first is a bald, chronological account of the campaign, with some detail regarding the events that consumed my time and the time of the campaign as a whole. The second, after a very brief discussion of Kurtz’s conception of the resources composing power in a political context, is an exploration of some of the specific techniques utilized by the campaign (and by other campaigns) to attain office. In the next sections, I will outline one more resource that impacted the running of the campaign, as an illustration of the ways in which social position, control of the ideational domain, and economic resources come together to create hegemonic power.
Election Day began cloudy. By the afternoon, it would be raining hard. Mulhern had got two campaign staffers to decorate a pickup truck with stand-up Marys (the “Marymobile”) and drive around the polling places in the district, policing our yard signs and creating one last visibility event. Mulhern and a friend of hers walked a few districts, knocking on a few more doors before going to vote. I met them at a grocery store in the district just as it began to rain, and helped them carry the Election Night party treats out to the car.

When we returned to Mulhern’s house, the rain continued. Mary’s friend left to pick up her child at school. Mary had heard that rain was a bad sign for Democrats, who notoriously stayed home if there were any complications to the voting process. While I
have no idea if that was the case in our race, I do know that it rained right through the afternoon rush hour, stopping only when the polls closed.

During the day, Mary and I talked politics and watched the news. Mary considered going back out, to shake hands at the polling places or to make herself visible in some other way. I dissuaded her, because we both knew what the outcome of the race was going to be. After both newspapers endorsed Ferlita, we saw a steady increase in Ferlita yard signs. A few dozen or even a few hundred votes would not have changed the outcome. Signs had been pointing toward a defeat for some time and we were under no illusions, despite the periodic hope that would strike us hard as we heard rumors of the huge Democratic Congressional success building around the nation. Although the results were not yet in, national exit polling was beginning to indicate a massive shift in Congressional power, away from the Republicans and toward a relatively new crop of Democrats. Perhaps Mulhern’s disappointment, after all our walking, talking, and knocking, was abated somewhat by the prospect of some relief to the political frustration that had motivated her to seek office in the first place.

After several hours of joking and chatting, it was time to start getting ready for the Election Night party. Mary went to change clothes and I began loading materials into the car. As the polls closed, I drove the food and drink over to the campaign treasurer’s home, where the party was held. The home, a relatively small property within a hundred yards of Bayshore Boulevard, one of the priciest sections of real estate in the region, was soon to be filled with her friends and family. We later heard that Rose Ferlita’s Election Night party was crammed with hundreds of admirers. Mary’s party was much smaller – perhaps 50 people in total.
Some of the people who were there were en route between multiple election parties. Many were heading to one of the several parties related to the gubernatorial campaign of Congressman Jim Davis, whose departure from the United States Congress made it possible for Kathy Castor to run for that Democratic seat. Castor’s departure from County Commission, lest we forget, is what made it possible for Mary to run for the Commission. Davis lost. Castor won, holding what was considered a very safe Democratic seat.

People drifted in and out of the party. As election returns began to appear on the Election Supervisor’s official website, it became increasingly apparent that our suspicions were true. The contest was over. Mary had lost.

I wandered outside to the screened patio and enjoyed the relatively cool air. Conversations danced around the subject of Mary’s loss. The mood was subdued. Guests began to leave the party, going home or going on to wake Jim Davis’ disappointing Election Night. I stayed until Mary told me to leave. Having been with her through the whole process, I didn’t want to just walk away. Eventually, of course, that’s what I had to do, walking out of the house alone, down the still-damp street to my car.

The final tally was: Ferlita 38,426; Mulhern 27,177.

Months later, when Mary’s overcrowded victory party was held after her Tampa City Council race, much of the sadness and disappointment was gone. After Ferlita won the County Commission seat, Mary Mulhern turned around, against my advice, and began her run for City Council against Shawn Harrison. I felt it was far too soon. I thought that Shawn Harrison had many of the same resources that Ferlita had possessed in the Commission race: a Republican with a vaguely positive track record on City
Council, with enormous capital resources ($210,422.47 - many times what Mary Mulhern would, ultimately raise during her City Council bid: $47,377.50). Prior to the City Council election, Harrison had been discussed as a potential mayoral candidate, for whom the city-wide Council race was a trial balloon designed to show backers that he could win outside his own neighborhood. I felt that Mary stood little chance of overcoming those advantages.

However, I was probably the only person telling her this. Many of Mulhern’s friends and family told her: that she had done a great job in getting her name out; that she could take advantage of the name recognition that she had amassed to get enough votes for the win; that the money was a problem but not an insurmountable one; that Shawn Harrison was nowhere near the known quantity that Ferlita was.

In the end, Mary’s advisors were right. Harrison’s mayoral aspirations were dashed along with his City Council At-Large seat hopes. After the election, Harrison was regarded as a disappointment who could not manage a serious, big-city campaign.

The final tally in the second race was Mulhern: 13,219, Harrison: 12,640.
6.1 Theory Revisited

In this section I will try to relate some of the observations that I have made during my work in the field, with regard to the theoretical orientations that I have absorbed during this process.

6.1.1 Political Anthropology

As I mentioned in the last section, leaders derive their power, according to Kurtz (2001:32-38) from material and ideational domains of resources. Briefly, the two resource domains identified are: Material (subdivided into supporters and tangible, material resources); Ideational (subdivided into ideological, symbolic, and informational). The following is a description of some of the ways in which these various domains of power interact, and the way they can be made manifest in a political arena, especially with regard to the control of and access to information during the campaign.

One of the paradigms described by Kurtz that has yet to fade from my understanding of politics is the processual model. The processual paradigm in political anthropology stemmed from the argument “that politics was a process in which political agents used power and a variety of strategies to attain public goals” (2001:13). Although, as I noted in the brief history of political anthropology, detailed in chapter two, the paradigm has varied in popularity since its original proponents advanced the key concepts in the post-War period, there are still elements which deserve consideration.
Mulhern’s campaign can be seen as, in a way, an exploration of the process of getting elected. Marshalling resources, deploying them to various tactical ends, attempting to achieve strategic objectives: all were on display during the campaign. Kurtz briefly details some of the areas of importance in processual interpretations of political process (2001:105-106): conflict, force and coercion, support, legitimacy, political field, political arena. Conflict was, of course, visible, not just in the electoral process itself, but in debates, blog entries, the street-corner placement of signs, and a number of other arenas. Force and coercion were not large factors in the race. Although there was some harassment during campaign visibility events (consider the vignette at the beginning of chapter three, which ends with a city official removing our signs; on another occasion, a man approached Mulhern’s sign-wavers and suggested that we should give up because we stood no chance against Ferlita – he then began waving signs not to far from us as a one-man counter-protest), there was never any violence.

Support, in the processual sense, was in abundant example throughout the contest. Ferlita and Harrison raised hundreds of thousands of dollars; even Mulhern managed to raise tens of thousands of dollars. Ferlita, Mulhern, and Harrison were supported by certain factions, who provided their symbolic aid in the form of official endorsements. Mary, for example, was happy to garner the endorsement of both newspapers during her City Council race. Although endorsements are not a guarantee of success in electoral politics, their presence is heartening to campaign workers and they surely must influence some voters to change their position. The Hillsborough County Democratic Black Caucus is in the habit of releasing a palm-card prior to each election, on which is printed a list of their selections for every race on the ballot. This palm card is distributed by
members of the caucus to residents of traditional African American neighborhoods. Support is, of course, the fuel of successful political operations.

Legitimacy, in the processual sense, is treated more in the sense of support than a simple shared set of victory conditions and an acknowledgement of defeat. Rather, according to Kurtz’s interpretation of the paradigm, legitimacy derives “from the values held by those political agents involved in attaining political goals and those affected by them” (2001:106). In this sense, legitimacy, as a quality, is based on the same combination of ideological and material supports that constitute hegemony (see chapter two as well as my brief synopsis below).

The political field, “composed of those agents who are directly involved in the process under scrutiny” (Kurtz 2001:106), consisted not only of the candidates and their immediate followers (of which I was one) but also some of the party bosses, as well as party factions. The offensive direct mail piece distributed by the Swanson campaign in an effort to damage Ferlita’s run represents the best example of this faction-fighting. However, despite the lack of opposition for much of the primary race (her only opponent dropped out early to run for another office; Mulhern was unopposed during the primaries), Mulhern did face some factional fragmentation as Democrats with a long working relationship with Ferlita committed to supporting Ferlita before they knew who the Democratic candidate would be. The interplay of these individuals and factions certainly played a role in the larger contest.

Another processual concept at play in the election was that of the political arena. The arena is “a temporal-spatial abstraction” (Kurtz 2001:106) that “constituted the agents and organizations that constituted the [political] field” (ibid.). In this case, the
arena was that span of time from Mulhern’s declaration until the final votes were tallied, with different individuals, factions, organizations, supports, and sites of conflict moving in and out, playing a momentary role, and then moving on.

Gledhill (2000:127-135) explores some of the various ways that political anthropological concepts can be explored through an examination of micro-processes. Indeed, from an ethnographic stand point, it would be hard to do otherwise. Gledhill gives a few examples of the intimacy of political power, how much larger systemic resources can serve as supports of direct action within the arena, how larger systemic or institutional forces manifest themselves as the arena itself. One can imagine gigantic, overlapping spheres, constituting the larger political economic forces, manifesting, at the local level (the point of contact or overlap), as a particular individual or small group of individuals, with all their assets and liabilities, all their techniques and beliefs.

Of course, the processual model was not the only, nor, in some ways, the most important aspect of political anthropology for this paper. As I have argued in the Literature Review, ideology and hegemony are concepts that I intended as the most important concepts in this paper. To reiterate, these two concepts represent related but distinct topics. Ideology represents the body of shared beliefs or ideas that are associated with any group of people that explain or rationalize that group’s relationship to the means of production. By contrast, hegemony is a form of leadership and control within a society whereby leaders use their socio-structural control of language and interpretations of history to elicit complicity and assent to power relationships on their behalf from a subaltern population. In other words, and this was an important assumptions of my work, it is possible to have ideology without having a hegemonic control of society as a whole.
Without this assumption, there are no alternatives to the dominant power structure. History teaches us that alternatives are always present. While the dominant elites may make some alternatives less palatable or even punishable, the alternatives must be there for lasting change to take place. Consider a community after a natural disaster. Given alternatives, the society can be reconstructed in a number of different ways. Without palatable alternatives, the society is simply rebuilt in a manner consistent with the way that it was prior to the catastrophe, assuming that the resources are still there for its maintenance.

One example of the interplay of ideology and hegemony comes to us from considerations of incumbency in American politics. Of course, the ardent mistrust of incumbents in many areas of American politics (that mistrust is an ideological resource), at one level, benefits entrenched elites who are not subject to the electoral process – corporations, lobbyists, governmental bureaucrats all influence the political arena, and constitute members of the political field, without having to risk their position during even a rigged election. Legislators and members of the executive branch in the state of Florida are subject to term limits. What politician can amass the experience or the institutional memory of a giant corporation and its lobbyists? They constitute the unacknowledged branch of government, the branch of paid representatives (who act as custodians of what Kurtz would describe as a material resource benefiting certain candidates, working against others, 2001:32-35) that impact the legislative/executive/judicial process but that can transcend each branch in terms of permanence, durability, and institutional memory. Career bureaucrats can also benefit from the transient nature of the elected officials. The Tampa City Council members are described as “part-time” employees by the city
administration and some qualified candidates do not run for office because they fear the loss of income associated with taking on a job that pays less than they are accustomed to receive. So, it can be said that critics on the left and the right might find term-limits objectionable because they allow for the formation of power structures that are very resistant to popular electoral democracy.

On another level, however, hostility to incumbents can benefit potential organic intellectuals (true outsiders) because that very mistrust can be used as a prop in an election. While Mulhern’s campaign against Shawn Harrison did benefit those members of the established power structure that could profit by Mulhern being a novice legislator, a newcomer to the political scene, and an inexperienced administrator, the fact that the electorate is willing to believe the worst of a candidate and vote accordingly is a manifestation of the power of this anti-incumbency concept. Anti-incumbency is, perhaps, one of the pressure points through which outsider candidates can attack the hegemonic formation.

These are just a few examples of the advantage of hegemonic control. It is an important point that needs restating: hegemony is a process that capitalizes on ideological interpretations but also employs structural advantages that create a persistent edge to those that are in control. It is very important to note, however, that the edge is never enough to trump all resistance and, in fact, it can create opportunities for the dismantling of aspects of the system. The political history of Tampa and Hillsborough is replete with instances that developed in exactly this way; see the section, above, summarizing the history of Tampa/Hillsborough politics. The fissures within any group, at the structural level (in the form of social/political organization) or at the ideological level (in the form
of disagreements regarding specific policies because of confusion, at the class level, as to the most beneficial way to advance class interests: witness differences within the avowed conservative movement regarding abortion rights, for example; alternatively, consider the ways in which being pro-business was exploited by different entrants in the mayoral races of the last century), create points of purchase, where an outsider can challenge the status quo but the edge often is sufficient to maintain a dominant position. Interpretations of election results based on political positions often overlook this fundamental point: unsavory positions are not sufficient to end a campaign. Often, it is the ability of a campaign to simply avoid or change a given subject that conveys the edge, rather than having a desirable platform position. In the 2004 Presidential campaign, for example, President Bush’s campaign successfully avoided discussing the deficiencies of their tenure in office by concentrating on discussing the character of their opponent, Senator John Kerry.

If we are to assume that hegemony is composed of the structural and superstructural elements of society (that is, the political, economic, and ideological), if it, in the words of Gramsci “is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (1971:244), then exploiting the weakness of that complex is the only way to create political opportunity for the outsider, short of violent overthrow. Short of total victory, more or less overt attempts to attack the structural formation (revolution or even non-violent protest) can be dismissed by the power structure as the grumbling of a few malcontents, further evidence of their marginality. Sufficiently massive force to forcibly destroy state formations is, of course,
beyond the purview of this work and, in any case, presents a related but different set of problems. However, attacking pressure points within the system – ideological or political/economic – through the electoral process or by finding ways to lobby those already in power, can create fissures within the hegemonic bloc, allowing the outsider, the marginalized, to move to the forefront.

It should be noted that the starker the contrast, the easier the ideological contest for hegemonic supremacy should be. The adoption of a platform with more extremist positions (by comparison with accepted norms within a given community – which norms are, themselves, set by the interplay of ideology and hegemony) can present opportunities for a comparative outsider who is more accommodating to the diversity of opinion within a community. For example, in the run-up to the primary election, we hoped that conservative candidate Brad Swanson would garner his party’s nomination. Had Swanson done so, the Democrats that had been peeled away by Ferlita’s more moderate variety of Republicanism would have scampered back into the fold, supporting Mulhern in the general election. Swanson’s platform was based on what are commonly called “values” issues – he was against abortion and opposed gay marriage. In fact, his attacks on Ferlita were based on the contention that she, at least, did not oppose same-sex marriage. While this message did successfully garner a significant minority of the vote, it was regarded as either too extreme or practically unpalatable to the voters during the primary. Ferlita’s campaign, with its campaign literature focus on “Experience. Leadership. Integrity.” was ambiguous. That message appeared on front of her unusual, tri-fold brochures, which took the place, in her campaign, of more traditional palm-cards. The brochure’s text gave more detail regarding Ferlita’s objectives as a politician, but
consider the five bullet points listed there, nominally summarizing her attitude toward
government and her qualifications for candidacy: “I will stand strong against increased
taxes and fees; I will stand strong in support of neighborhoods and families; I will fight
wasteful government spending; I will work to promote smart growth that pays its own
way; I will stand firmly committed to our first responders [police and firefighters], in the
name of public safety” (Ferlita Campaign Brochure). Although one could object to the
actual means for executing each of these principles, none of them is susceptible to attack
by an opponent. What could an opponent suggest? “I HATE neighborhoods and
families!” Hardly likely. Even the bullet points that come closest to outlining a specific
set of policy directives (the first and fourth points) seem to contradict one another. How
can you simultaneously be for getting growth to pay its own way without levying fees or
taxes against the developers that are doing the growing? The strength of this document
comes from its ambiguity, its adherence to the forms of political literature rather than the
compelling message of the document. Such a document would appeal to conservatives
concerned about economic issues but put off, perhaps, by the ugliness of Swanson’s more
aggressive conservatism while simultaneously avoiding language that could repel the
Democrats that supported Ferlita in the general election. In other words, she walked a
tight rope between not-conservative-enough and too-conservative. During the primary
fight, Ferlita put up a billboard with this message on it: “Simply Rose. Conservative
Republican Leadership.” This billboard is depicted in the section on outdoor advertising
in chapter five. This was a direct response to Swanson’s attacks from the right, a
reminder that she was, indeed, a conservative meriting support (or at least not opposition)
from the core constituents of the party. Ferlita’s campaign removed the billboards
immediately after the primary, moving to a more centrist position in the two month general election campaign. For further consideration of the deployment of ideology on campaign literature, review the Results section, which provides a discussion of examples of materials used by Ferlita, Mulhern, and other candidates.

Ideology and hegemony are political economic considerations, but they dovetail neatly with the processual conceptions of political activity that I mentioned previously in this section. The work in political anthropology undertaken by this project was an effort to explore the micro-process, as Gledhill calls it, an effort to describe my dealings “with local actors such as community leaders campaigning on issues of importance to the residents, as well as representatives of the bureaucracy and national political parties” (2000:127). My hope was that I would find ways in which manipulation of ideological message could counter the accumulation and deployment of resources. It was my further hope that the various sources of support amassed during the campaign would be sufficient to overcome an overwhelming advantage on the part of the representative of hegemonic interests.

After spending weeks on the campaign trail, I think I can confirm some of the observations of the political anthropological world. The elements of the processual model are relevant, especially considerations of support and the arena. Hegemony does represent an advantage to the incumbent, but not an insurmountable one (especially in the hands of a lackluster representative). Economic resources and a willingness to provide service for powerful lobbying interests can combine to give a huge advantage to even the weakest of candidates.
6.1.2 Implications for Applied Anthropology

Lest we forget the objective of the project, I will now restate it for the purpose of clarity: The project was to change the complexion of the political landscape by aiding a politician who I, the author of this piece, thought was more sympathetic to my class interests. By working to advance the career of a comparatively liberal politician, I hoped to create an ally within the power structure who would assist my class.

However, it should be understood that, as a project, this was not an instance of research and development anthropology. My influence over the campaign was insufficient for me to manipulate or dominate the political process. I acted as an advisor, campaign volunteer, and researcher for the candidate. Mulhern has told me that she appreciates my “good instincts” related to local politics, but I was not the Svengali of the campaign. I did not insist on a particular theme or mission for her work, nor did I suggest that she alter her message in terms of content. Although I did, at times, volunteer opinions (based, to the best of my knowledge, on a grasp of the local political situation), Mary Mulhern never let my suggestions interfere with her quest for office. In the interests of modesty, I hasten to note that my advice regarding the municipal election cycle (that Mulhern not run) was disregarded, indicating that perhaps my instincts are less than wholly reliable!

In a follow-up interview I did some time after the election, Mulhern suggested that my participation in the campaign consisted of acting as an agent on her behalf. For example, she asked me to fill out endorsement questionnaires. Different organizations provide endorsements for candidates with whom they agree. To obtain the endorsement, you need to respond to questions, typically in the form of a questionnaire. One of my
campaign responsibilities was to interpret Mulhern’s platform in answering the questions. While my interpretations were designed to appeal to the parties asking the question, I didn’t make alterations to her platform, nor did I engage in any form of deception. As Mulhern said during the campaign, she would have to go out and actually say this stuff – make the accusations, challenge the assumptions, question her opponents – and she didn’t want to have to explain discrepancies.

Another task I did for the campaign involved the endless grunt work of the campaign. At Mulhern’s request, I knocked on doors, stuffed envelopes, placed yard signs, waved signs on street corners, distributed donuts and coffee to volunteers, made signs, blogged, updated the website, responded to campaign emails, and many other tasks, none too glamorous. All of those tasks need to be done, over and over in order to stay competitive in a campaign. On several occasions, it was just me and Mary. As a shoe-string campaign, my status as a volunteer was essential.

Ultimately, the purpose of this project was very explicitly working to attain elective office for a political candidate. To the extent that it was an applied anthropology project, it bears the most resemblance to the paradigms of applied anthropology and social science research that I have mentioned previously. However, there were some aspects of the process that raise questions related to applied involvement. I would not suggest that I have, in some way, transcended or abandoned earlier models for research, but I would contend that the value-laden approach to the process that I took differs in intensity from some existing styles of applied work.

This project consisted of two kinds of action research. My applied anthropological relationship with the campaign bears strong resemblance to the “action”
work with the Fox undertaken by Sol Tax (van Willigen 1986:59-78), which I described as “advocacy” in my chapter on methods, primarily to avoid confusion with “participatory action research.” There are two values associated with Tax’s action research model, including truth to the population with whom one is working and freedom for the population to be self-determining. This work easily satisfied both of those requirements. Mulhern set the agenda (getting elected and all the subsidiary activities) and I acted as her anthropological agent.

I was accountable to Mulhern for my work. It served no research agenda other than her own: see my brief discussion of participatory action research, next. I wasn’t testing any hypotheses aside from those encapsulated in the very first thing I said to Mulhern (see chapter one) – that I thought it would be possible to develop a credible counter-punch to offset some of the advantage that Mulhern’s opponent would have in the election. Mulhern was my client and I used the techniques I have learned in my social science work, as well as my grasp of the local political scene, to help her to the best of my ability. Mulhern set the objectives and the degree to which I could help her.

The other thread in terms of research is participatory action research, as I described above in the methods section. Greenwood and Levin (1998:10-13) suggest some of their beliefs with regard to conducting such research: the researcher’s job is to aid in the creation of democratic social change, as a technician, rather than as a director/manager; democracy is about the “creation of arenas for lively debate and for decision making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups” (1998:11); diversity is an “important feature of human society” (1998:12) and it should be encouraged in
research projects; action research situations are best when “social change is possible and can be influenced by the participants” (1998:12).

All these features were present during this project. Mulhern did not run an autocratic campaign. She collaborated on strategy, setting the “research” agenda every time she updated her campaign calendar with my assistance. Her candidacy was, in fact, a research project. How does one run a successful campaign for office? What resources are needed? What techniques should be used or avoided? We explored many aspects of this process in a democratic, collaborative way that respected a diversity of opinions. Mulhern, as I mentioned previously, was very forthcoming with regard to the level of involvement I was able to undertake. Part of this was simply practical: since she could not be everywhere or talk to everyone, it was a reasonable suggestion that I act as a surrogate or representative, whether it was at political meetings, organizing her website, or blogging on behalf of her campaign. Another aspect of this partnership or democratic relationship had to do with the personality of Mulhern herself: while she is a person of strong opinions on a wide array of topics, she was always willing, during the campaign, to listen to a suggestion. And, at last, there was the methodological rational for such a collaboration.

I think that, had I been more inclined to do so, I could have converted my less definite role into that of the campaign manager for Mulhern. Campaign managers provide logistical support for a campaign. They manage the candidate’s time, setting the literal agenda and plotting a course for the campaign. The candidate still sets the message, but the campaign manager has the responsibility of making sure the message gets out to the people. Campaign managers knock on doors, coordinate volunteers, and
so forth. Mulhern’s candidacy certainly benefitted from having a professional campaign manager during the second election cycle. She asked me, in a courteous kind of way, if I would be interested in taking on that role for her campaign, in fact. I declined, not because I was not flattered by her offer, but because I thought that was a slightly different role than the one I had envisioned at the outset. I would not have been her partner in the same way, at that point. I would have been simultaneously her employee and her manager; both roles involving a certain amount of subordination and dominance and neither role replicating the relationship I had with Mulhern, which, I believe, was firmly in the tradition of participatory action research.

However, participatory action research, in the sense of the relationship I described above, only begins to describe the degree of partisanship that I had to undertake as part of my collaboration. Consider, for a moment, an interchange that I had with my partner in research, Mary Mulhern. Toward the end of the County Commission race, when things began to look very bleak for Mulhern’s chances, I suggested that perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad; her opponent had begun to say things in public that we had been saying in our campaign literature from the beginning, especially with regard to responsible growth. Mulhern turned to me and said that she could not think like that. If she began to think about anything other than winning, it would, she said, not be worth continuing the process. In other words, unlike the typical participatory action research project where at least part of the process involves the researcher (me) evaluating goals and resetting priorities for the research partner (Mulhern), the value shift was almost entirely toward the direction of the partner. I worked very hard to help her attain her goal in the first race, long after I felt that it was out of reach as an objective. Mulhern gave up hope only
when the final vote was tallied. Of course, she didn’t allow that to provoke long-term hopelessness; she sought office again less than four months after her loss.

I believe that we made a good faith effort, as collaboration, to honor these beliefs. My work served the needs of the campaign but I was always available as a technician, advisor, or aide, when called upon to do so. My objectives as a researcher, though they bore some resemblance to the research and development techniques of older paradigms of applied anthropology (van Willigen 1986:79-91) were always within the various “action research” models – I was always both an ally and an advocate for the campaign, an agent who happened to have an appreciation of more abstract theoretical implications for our work. When asked, I commented on my understanding of events and at times, my collaborator/client accepted my advice. That, I think, is emblematic of the project as a whole.
6.2 Recommendations

It is hard to explore the political world without garnering a cynical outlook. Even honorable, honest (those that stay bought and those that are actually honest) politicians are forced to make compromises that can nauseate their loyal supporters. Dishonest politicians can, of course, do far worse. Certainly, adopting such a streak of cynicism is the defense that many participants in the process adopt. You can scarcely be hurt if you expect the worst.

However, my experience with the political system in this research should not be regarded as proof that cynicism is the best or even only way to interpret political events. Rather, I would like to draw attention to a few features of the political process that do seem to offer hope.

First, it is possible to influence the outcome of the political election. We could, of course, have a separate discussion about the efficacy of influencing the process, the degree to which meaningful change can be accomplished within any given span of time (weeks, months, years, decades). However, history has demonstrated, both in Tampa and in a more general context, that reforms can be undertaken, that injustices can be redressed (albeit often in an incomplete manner) and that persistence often pays dividends. Mary Mulhern may not be a savior but she has, at least, agreed with a basic set of beliefs that are associated with a kind of liberal Democracy. Her work in office is nominally an extension of those beliefs.
Mary Mulhern began the campaign with certain advantages, certainly (her class affiliation, her acquaintances in the Democratic Party, her life experiences as an administrator and journalist) but there was nothing inevitable about her election; remember, she lost the first time she ran. This is not cause for disappointment. Rather, it should be seen as validation of the position that a persistent attempt to change the outcome of the electoral process can overcome systemic advantages (both in terms of the economic resources possessed by Mulhern’s opponents as well as the structural advantages imparted by incumbency and membership in the power bloc). Mulhern did win. Work and persistence achieved that goal.

Second, it is possible to find common ground with voters, no matter what your perspective is. Voters are not stupid. They are, however, busy. I cannot tell you the number of times, while canvassing for Mulhern, that I found common ground with citizens; certainly dozens of times. People recognize the need for change when it’s necessary and they are willing to do what they can to effect change. However, they often cannot undertake change themselves because they have to work, sustain a family, and so forth. Still, if a candidate can show voters, by disseminating ideological information to them, in a way that doesn’t take too much of the voter’s time, that the candidate has a practical plan for his or her time in office, the candidate can often secure the support of a voter who can put them in a position to undertake it. I mention this because one common manifestation of political cynicism is the feeling that the average voter is too dumb to understand how he or she is getting screwed. While hegemonic formations (Kurtz 1996) do, indeed, convince people to allocate what little power they possess in ways that, at times, are counter to their own interests, dissatisfaction does not disappear when there is a
disparity between expectations and actual conditions within the political economic process. People who are afraid that they will lose what place they have in a society will be amenable to change agents, when they present themselves. The change agents simply have to present themselves in a way which is not inconsistent from the (admittedly hegemonic) conceptions of what a good leader is. Still, what this all means is that it is possible to communicate with intelligent voters who may label themselves with descriptors incompatible with change (for example, describing themselves as conservative or satisfied) who will, ultimately agree with an outsider candidate advocating a position of change because their dissatisfaction with the status quo makes them ripe for reasonable alternatives.

It is, admittedly, harder to do this at higher levels of political organization. A local-level candidate only has to convince a few hundred voters to choose one way or another. A national candidate has to not only approach millions of voters (probably an impossible proposition, even with the best of ground campaigns) but also has to overcome entrenched hegemonic power structures that are related to, but nominally outside the political process, like the national media. The national media routinely brand candidates who lack the conventional trappings of qualification (class, educational attainment, personal wealth, and so forth) as outsiders who stand no real chance of winning, despite the fact that many people agree with the candidate on one position or another. Ironically, this can sometimes work to a candidate’s advantage, as branding by the media creates opportunities for candidates to run away from their record. However, to reiterate, the electorate is not stupid and a candidate can find common ground with them if he or she is willing to find ways to communicate with them.
Third, local politics are an obvious point of attack and they should be exploited ferociously by motivated activists. While systemic advantages have a tendency, as I have argued, to stabilize national offices, a small body of motivated activists can change the complexion of a community’s politics if they are simply willing to take note of the first two points I made in this section: persistence and common ideological ground with voters (which necessarily includes a willingness to compromise on some issues, and not compromise on others). Understand that hegemonic formations are created by the interrelationship of individual agents and the systemic forces that create advantages for one or another. Without agency, the system becomes absurdly deterministic. The inequities of the system would cause it to grind itself to death. On the contrary, a skilled body of interpreters, acolytes, and other agents allows a political economic system to sustain itself, making adjustments to current conditions, explaining changes or rationalizing inequities, and reinforcing power arrangements through new technologies of social organization (see Sklair 1997). However, the system’s very reliance on a class of interpreters and operatives means that there are, occasionally, systemic disjunctures between the owners of the means of production and their representatives. Occasionally, the representatives feel that the execution of their responsibility to the society as a whole requires that they take more of an interest in the well being of the oppressed – the traditional liberal response to systemic inequities. From time to time, some member of the oppressed class, however, comes to the fore, a person who displays the acceptable superficial features of the ruling elites, but who explicitly or implicitly works to advance the class interests of the outsiders and the marginalized. The system has need of low-
level operatives and, in one of the great ironies of modern industrial capitalism; these posts can often be had by such an outsider candidate.

One hundred years ago, women were not allowed to vote and African Americans voted at their peril. Change has taken place in that time. Some might argue that features of the change, to allow inclusion, are manifestations of the benign characteristics of capitalism. Critics might argue that their inclusion in the process is simply a way of co-opting resistance. Ultimately, it does not matter what the explanation for this change is. It is now possible for some outsiders to access and influence the political process. This is not a small accomplishment and it did not occur because of some kind of dictatorial implementation of a policy of inclusion. It occurred because of incremental changes undertaken by activists who were willing to undergo the ordeal of change. Some were activists, who challenged the system overtly. But others were organic intellectuals, people who provided an alternative interpretation of events from the hegemonic status quo. Their actions made change possible because they provided the means for actually effecting it. Riots, protests, and other forms of citizen unrest can be dismissed by the system as hooliganism, trouble-making, or some other form of criminal subversion. But those actions, backed by intermediaries capable of contesting existing power structures from within (lawyers, politicians, enlightened business owners) can create incremental change, and, ultimately, a new hegemonic bloc, with new structures. It might not happen immediately, but it can happen eventually.

In this way, change and, indeed, revolution can occur.

Remember, after all, that only a few hundred years ago, our species did not live in political economic relationships like those we find in today’s societies. Change has
occurred. I hope that by drawing attention to some aspects of my limited experience that I have been able to draw attention to the hope implicit in my analysis. Determination, persistence, a willingness to find common ground, and the exploitation of the local power structure are all ways in which long-term change can be implemented.

Abolishing cynicism from electoral (or, perhaps, any other form of) politics is probably impossible. The challenges of existing political systems are daunting for an outsider or even a dissatisfied insider. At a certain level, abolishing cynicism may not even be desirable. Certainly, a cynical observer of the political scene is less likely to be surprised by some horrendous reversal of fortunes than an optimist. However, cynicism can be tempered with a sort of hope. It is not impossible to attain limited objectives and, after all, limited objectives are the building blocks of much, much larger objectives.

Figure 10: Volunteers waving at a campaign visibility event on West Hillsborough Avenue
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About the Author

E.J. Ford was born in Boston but has lived most of his life in the Tampa Bay Area. Ford is a past president of the University of South Florida Anthropology Alumni Society and the USF chapter of Graduate Assistants United. He has done research on community organizations, physical and mental health services, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues, and, of course, politics. He is a committed activist. In 2008, he followed the lessons he learned in this research process and launched a campaign for the State Legislature in Florida.