

OUR LIBERTIES WE PRIZE:
ACCESS, CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS, AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL
CAMPAIGNS

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ABSTRACT

Our Liberties We Prize is a project exploring how variable levels of control exercised and access granted or denied by campaign staff impacts how photographers represented candidates and the elections. Using Erving Goffman's Framing Theory as groundwork, further informed Doris Graber's work in *Mass Media and American Politics*, we can look at experiences of photographers in the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaigns to understand what the photos they made said about the candidates and the election itself, as well as how factors such as control and access influenced that coverage. In order to explore this issue through first-hand knowledge and experience, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two freelance photographers who worked in Iowa during the campaigns leading up to the 2016 Iowa Caucuses. Aaron Bernstein, a freelance photographer working for a variety of outlets including Thomson Reuters and Getty Images, provided his insights about this election and was able to contrast his experiences against past elections he covered. Natalie Keyssar, a freelancer working for TIME Magazine, spoke about her experiences on the campaign trail as well, using her background covering international politics in Latin America to provide additional insight on the state of political coverage in the United States.

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS COMPONENT

Our Liberties We Prize is also a documentary photo essay on the campaigns in Iowa leading up to the first in the nation 2016 Iowa Caucus, a tone-setting political process of selecting delegates, but more than that a cultural event for the people of Iowa and the politicians vying for their support. These photos, while at some times seemingly incongruous, explore the culture and theatricality of the Iowa campaigns and the cult of personality that ebbs and flows around each candidate. In the majority of the images, the candidate is shown but their face is obfuscated, their gesture and the stagecraft around them a mirror for, but distant from their audience. The project specifically focuses on the top candidates at the end of the caucuses, including Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Ted Cruz, and Donald Trump, with appearances by the lower polling candidates, searching for authentic Iowa campaign experiences against a growing backdrop of extremely polished campaign events.