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ABSTRACT

Building on the work of technical communication scholars concerned with social justice and electoral politics, this article examines the Coray for Congress (1994) campaign as a case study to argue in support of a more formal disciplinary commitment to political technical communication (PxTC). Specifically, I closely analyze the ideographic communication design of pre-digital PxTC artifacts from the campaign archive. The type of pre-digital political communication design products analyzed in this article are ubiquitous even today. The implications of four dominant ideographs are analyzed in this case study: <jobs>, <communities>, <families>, and <●○●>. Key takeaways for PxTC practitioners, educators, and scholars are discussed.

CCS Concepts

CCS → Social and professional topics

Keywords

Ideographic analysis, Political technical Communication, electioneering technology

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INTRODUCTION

Language, access, and power converge in an electoral system that disenfranchises voters through technical communication and technology designed to promote apathy and truncate civic participation. In this case study of one politician's campaign materials, I argue that political communication designs should be critically examined for the ideologies they rely on for message coherence. I have three goals in this article: first, to explore political technical communication as a sphere of inquiry for communication design scholars; second, to demonstrate the ideographic power of communication design in order to encourage practitioners to be cognizant of the ideologies they design for; and third, make a case for studying the genre of electioneering technology.

Combining a cultural studies lens (Longo, 1998) with rhetorical inquiry, I analyze the ideographs (McGee, 1980) contained in Bobbie Coray's printed campaign materials from her failed 1994 run against the seven-term incumbent from Utah's First Congressional District (UT-01) Representative Jim Hansen. A reader may reasonably wonder why study an old, failed, congressional campaign? Coray was a rare female Democratic politician in a deep red state, where patriarchal cultural attitudes about women were prevalent at the time, and remain so to this day. A case in point, the seat that Coray ran for has been held only by cis-gendered males—a point that adds salience to the archival recovery of the *Coray for Congress* campaign. Beyond gender, Coray's campaign is ideal for its ubiquitous blandness and although ultimately unsuccessful, Coray was a better fundraiser and captured more of the vote than most of her UT-01 Democratic nomination successors to date. Running in a year where the electoral outcome is often described as a "Republican Revolution," Coray planted herself firmly in the ideological center. A product of Clintonian third way politics, her core <jobs>, <communities>, <families> messaging strategy was shared by many other mid-90's centrists across the country.

Coray's campaign also illustrates that the use of technology in politics has a genesis that extends beyond the digital era. Printed campaign materials such as yard signs, brochures, and mailers are still commonly used political communication tools that

supplement more modern digital campaign tools. As a case study of communication design in pre-digital political campaigning, this work attempts to lay a foundation for a sub-disciplinary line of inquiry: political technical communication (PxTC). I humbly offer PxTC as a way to recognize and amplify an existing trend of technical communication scholarship concerned with electoral politics (e.g. Dorpenyo & Agboka, 2018; Whitney, 2013). In addition to delineating PxTC from Professional & Technical Communication (PTC), the “x” signifies the multiplicity of political engagements made possible by the cross-pollination of politics and technical communication. I hope that by naming PxTC, I may invite more inquiry and conversation from technical communicators and communication designers about our field’s relationship to electoral politics, the outcomes of which have the potential to both exacerbate and ameliorate political, economic, and social harm.

In this paper, I argue that two primary genres of technology should concern sub-disciplinary work in PxTC: election-related and electioneering-related communication technologies. Where election technologies may be described as any sufficiently technical artifact related to the administration of elections, electioneering technologies may be described as any sufficiently technical artifact related to advocating for a partisan electoral outcome. Building on the work of technical communication scholars concerned with election technology related to the maintenance of elections like ballot design (Jones & Williams, 2018), GIS software that enables racial gerrymandering (Sánchez, 2018), and biometric voter identification (Dorpenyo, 2019), I propose extending technical communication scholarship and practice into electioneering technology related to political campaigns with the goal of expanding PxTC inquiry. Dorpenyo & Agboka (2018) broadly define *election technologies* to include “paper ballots, voter registration, voter education materials, internet technologies, scanners, ballot printing materials, user manuals and other technical documents used during elections” (p. 349). I define the contrasting term *electioneering technologies* just as broadly to include campaign mailers, yard signs, donation solicitation emails, candidate websites and social media operations, voter file databases, field operations software, campaign finance disclosures, peer-to-peer campaign texting, IP targeted advertising, campaign plans, paths to victory outlines and any other technical documents used by political campaigns.

Through this case study, I demonstrate how ideographic communication design combines textual and visual elements that rely on and extend pre-existing dominant ideological beliefs. McGee writes that ideographs are “the political language which manifests ideology” (p. 5) and he argues that an analysis of these building blocks can reveal power structures at work in persuasive appeals. Ideographs have traditionally been understood as textual, but some scholars have recognized that powerful visual imagery and communication design techniques can also function ideographically (Edwards & Winkler, 1997). I argue that underlying Coray’s rather plain “Jobs, Communities, and Families” messaging strategy are powerful raced and gendered ideologies. To be clear, the analysis found here should not be read as an indictment of Bobbie Coray, who this author admires for her pioneering achievements as a successful woman in a patriarchal state. Rather, I aim to show how even the most banal political communication designs can be driven by and may extend dominant cultural ideologies.

In the next section, I review critical concepts borrowed from technical communication, science and technology studies,

political science, and rhetoric to make the case for naming and recognizing PxTC as an emerging area of technical communication expertise. I then briefly describe the specific artifacts and rhetorical methods used in this study. Finally, I engage in an analysis of the ideographic communication design of recovered PxTC artifacts. Analysis includes the historical context, contestation of meaning, and ideological alignment of each ideograph found in the *Coray for Congress* campaign materials: <jobs>, <communities>, <families>, and <●○○●>. I conclude with key takeaways for technical communication practitioners, educators, and scholars.

GENRES OF TECHNOLOGY IN POLITICAL TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Technical communication scholarship and practice derives from the need for communicators to mediate between the technical and lay domains. This mediation is not neutral. The cultural studies turn in technical communication was necessary because “Good technical writing is [often] so clear that it is invisible” (Longo, 1998, p. 54). This invisibility has the effect of concealing that technical writing is a product of cultural attitudes, norms, and ideologies. Cultural studies have made broad contributions to the field by highlighting the complicity of technical communication practitioners and academics in reproducing problematic iterations of the culture they are embedded within (Scott et al., 2006; Longo, 1998). Longo writes that “One point of studying technical writing as a cultural practice is to make visible what seems invisible in technical writing, to view what seems inevitable as a product of culture” (p. 65). The incorporation of cultural studies in technical communication has been an invaluable precursor to the social justice turn in the discipline (Agboka, 2014; Jones, 2016; Walton et al., 2019) by making practitioners, educators, and scholars alike more accountable and aware of the role that supposedly neutral and a-political writing technologies play in sustaining structures of oppression.

Raced and gendered structures are sustained, in part, by the treatment of cultural artifacts as neutral. Such is the case in electioneering, where a lot of rhetorical labor goes into crafting vacuous and almost neutral messages intended to persuade broad segments of the electorate without necessarily committing a candidate to specific proposals (e.g. hope, change, x deserves better, building bridges, etc.). These enthymematic messages rely on dominant, and often oppressive, cultural understandings, interpretations, and ideologies to provide the illusion of common ground where it may or may not actually exist. If they are known for anything, technical communicators are known for their efficient and effective distillation of expertise through strategic and tactical communication skills—but in doing this work, as Katz (1992) famously demonstrates with the Just memo, it is all too easy to forgo critical awareness for expediency in technical communication.

Technical communicators and communication designers are already doing political work. Any design, distillation, or distribution of multimodal political messages is an act of technical communication, which is why the tech-comm toolbox is being increasingly brought to bear on electoral politics in ways that, if nurtured, may open new avenues for our students and new opportunities for social justice minded scholars and practitioners to positively impact electoral outcomes. A recent example of sustained PxTC scholarly inquiry may be found in a guest edited special issue of *Technical Communication* focused on election technology. In the editorial introduction for the issue, Dorpenyo and Agboka

(2018) make a compelling case that technical communicators ought to leverage their expertise in mediating technology and society to better understand the role that election technology plays in shaping democracy. They argue that technical communicators have a responsibility to engage in electoral politics because “It is necessary to expose students to ways in which they can initiate local action to effect changes in their communities” (Dorpenyo & Agboka, 2018, p. 350). I agree and offer a PxTC case study as way to extend and amplify this work.

Previous scholarship linking technical communication to politics is groundbreaking because it opens the door for further examination of the role that the discipline plays in democratic processes. I agree with Dorpenyo and Agboka (2018) that “If technologies raise concerns about integrity, social justice, usability, and human rights, technical communicators can play a mediating role in how people interface with technologies and/or how they can effectively use their technologies to accomplish their civic, political, or democratic goals” (p. 350). Jones and Williams (2018) add that “Our challenge as technical communicators is to know how to respond if asked to write, design, or distribute information used to facilitate oppression and discrimination” (p. 384). I agree and would add that specific communication design choices made by political campaigns intentionally and unintentionally align messaging with problematic ideologies held by the electorate.

As mentioned above, it is important to distinguish between two primary genres of technology emerging in the study of PxTC: election and electioneering related. Dorpenyo and Agboka (2018) take a broad view of election technologies writing that they “are not merely suggesting [only] the physical equipment with or on which votes are cast” (p. 349). Rather, election technology encompasses many different pieces of hardware and software used in the administration of elections. A relatively early example of PxTC scholarship concerned with election technology is Whitney’s (2013) exploration of xenophobic tropes about immigrants found in a voter education guide. What makes the voter education guide election-related vs electioneering-related? First, it facilitates the administration of an election; and second, it is framed as a non-partisan communication. Far from perfect, these two elements offer a litmus test to understand the difference between these PxTC genres of technology. Absentee ballot design, voter instructions from county clerks, voter identification methods are but a few more examples of election-related technologies. In contrast campaign logos, websites, and mailings are electioneering-related technologies because they perform partisan advocacy rather than aid the non-partisan administration of elections.

Design is political—it is the planning and implementation of technologies to mediate the social environment (Boehnert, 2018). Importantly, this definition implies that design and politics are technological. Power is the common denominator. In the minutia of technological design and implementation, power is at work. The success of modern political campaigns often turns on the skilled application of technology to frame elections, fundraise, and get out the vote. The rhetorical and technological training of technical communicators makes them well prepared to interrogate ideologically infused political technologies. Notably, this articulation of technology extends beyond digital technologies that often compose the boundaries of what is popularly considered technological—a point this article attempts to drive home by emphasizing pre-digital PxTC artifacts. Heidegger (1977) argued that technology is “no mere means. Technology is a way

of revealing” (p. 12) and a human activity that enframes human activity. Following his concern with the essence of technology more than specific devices, the inquiry laid out here is driven by a desire to understand the essence of technology-intensive campaigning (Kreiss, 2016). Modern campaigns leverage significant advances in technology to both activate and suppress voting to achieve electoral success. However, technology-intensive campaigning is not a new phenomenon, just an understudied one.

Pre-digital era campaigns also relied on centralized party data and printed technologies in order to achieve the same ends. I am particularly concerned with how advances in “Communication technologies [...] embody and enforce new social relations” (Haraway, 1991, p. 164). There is little doubt that computers, the internet, and social media have profoundly altered democratic engagement, but part of the purpose of this paper is to remind readers that so too did the printing press. Electoral politics relies on technological enframing (Heidegger, 1977) in order for voters to make sense of candidates and issues. Even in the pre-digital era, candidates came to be known less through direct contact and more through mediated impression. Pre-digital PxTC artifacts like business cards, yard signs, and bumper stickers are technological because they leverage communication design to enframe elections by aligning candidates with dominant raced and gendered ideologies.

Kreiss (2016) writes that as technology-intensive campaigning has progressed “this has meant that infrastructure building and system design, long familiar to science and technology studies scholars, are now essential to contemporary political communication” (p. 208). However, I argue that politics and technology have always been co-constitutive as the techné of persuasive messaging enframes electoral choices. Successful politicians are the ones that are effective at deploying discrete tactics of influence that align with strategic understandings of their electorates. Politics has not become more technology-intensive—it has always already been technological.

Haraway (1991) argues that “Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization” (p. 153) and what is politics except the negotiation of power in civilization? The PxTC critic, with their rhetorical training and facility with writing technologies, is well suited to do the intellectual labor of revealing that which electioneering technology often renders opaque: the ideologies that drive the crafting and consumption of political campaign communications. The present case study is an attempt to demonstrate such an effort through archival recovery of electioneering technology artifacts from a pre-digital campaign and subsequent rhetorical analysis of ideographs embedded in the communication design of each artifact. In the next section, the recovered artifacts and rhetorical methods are briefly described before moving onto an analysis of each ideograph in turn.

ARCHIVAL RECOVERY OF IDEOGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION DESIGNS

Taking inspiration from Jones and Williams’s (2018) use of archival research on literacy tests and voter registration forms as examples of the disenfranchising potential of election technology, I set out spelunking in local archives to explore the relationship between electioneering technology and disenfranchisement. As this case study demonstrates, problematic ideologies often hide in seemingly innocuous, even if enthymematic, political messaging.

Jobs for whom? What communities? Whose family? Vagueness is an effective rhetorical tactic that leaves room for politicians to triangulate and reinvent themselves while still benefiting from message coherence and the ideological adherence of their base.

Rhetorical scholar Michael McGee (1980) articulates the concept of the “ideograph” to understand how rhetoric contributes to the maintenance of political ideology. Ideology is “transcendent, as much an influence on the belief and behavior of the ruler as on the ruled” (McGee, 1980, p. 5). In other words, ideology is a form of social control that impacts both the oppressor and the oppressed in a constitutive fashion that constructs the hierarchical relationship between both entities in the background through prior persuasion. By combining a Marxist understanding of ideology with a Burkean understanding of God terms and motivations, McGee (1980) offers up the rhetorical device of “ideographs” as “one-term sums of an orientation” that no one is “permitted to question” yet function “clearly and evidently as agents of political consciousness” (p. 7). Ideographs are building blocks that both rely on and help to sustain prior ideological commitments of the audience and speaker—they are also ideal political technical communication artifacts because they attempt to distill complex political ideas into easy-to-consume combinations of text and graphic design. Ideographs may be understood as a sub-type of expediency-based communication ethics roundly criticized by Stephen Katz (1992).

I agree with McGee that ideographs control the ruler as well as the ruled. In this context, that means the intention of Bobbie Coray and her staff are not as relevant to their use as they are evidence of the ideological underpinnings of both her campaign and the constituency she is attempting to persuade. Ideographic analysis reminds us that authors are themselves products of ideology and their participation in ideological reproduction is only, at most, a partially conscious endeavor. However, I disagree with McGee’s characterization of ideographs as solely verbal and will argue that visual elements—like photographs, color choice, and layout—can also function ideographically. Edwards and Winkler (1997) extend McGee’s concept of ideographs to analyze the visual imagery of editorial cartoonist appropriations of the iconic depiction of soldiers raising the American flag over Iwo Jima during World War II. They write that “the parodied Iwo Jima image transcends its historical referents, gains meaning from its subsequent symbolic associations, and helps create and reaffirm the identity of the body politic through its ideographic functions” (302). The original image is iconic because it is broadly recognizable as a celebration of American dominance and perseverance. But it becomes ideographic through parodic deployment that relies on the image’s recognizable qualities to invoke ideological paradigms such as patriotism and militarism.

Edwards and Winkler (1997) make a compelling case that imagery can contribute ideographically to the maintenance and extension of problematic ideologies as well. I agree with them that ideographs are a useful analytical tool for some images. The authors write that “If either the elite or the non-elite are influenced by the image exclusively, or the purposes of the image are clearly defined and unequivocal, or the image lacks the elasticity to accommodate meanings beyond its contextual specifics, the image fails to meet the requirements of the ideograph” (305). Printed PxTC artifacts use design, layout, and color to supplement text and align a candidate with dominant cultural ideologies. Constituents are not influenced by the image exclusively, but by the combination of communication design techniques and sloganeering that promote

ideological adherence to a specific campaign. Meaning may be contextually determined but not exclusively and certainly not in an uncontested fashion. A candidate’s yard sign, for example, contains an elasticity to it that reveals *some*-thing about a candidate, but not *every*-thing about the candidate. Short phrases are substituted for substantive and lengthy campaign platforms while color usage may invoke party or community affiliation.

Barbara L’Eplattenier (2009) argues that archival research should include a detailed account of the methods used to locate and contextualize the often-unsystematic work of archival recovery. She writes that “a methods section in a history helps us create a self-aware, self-reflective, self-representational description of not only how information was found, but also the time and care used to put that information together” (p. 75). To this end, I briefly describe the archive that drives my analysis. Bobbie Coray’s archive is housed in the Special Collections and Archives Division in the Merrill-Cazier Library at Utah State University (MSS 422). It is a relatively small collection at just 19 boxes, or 8.5 linear feet, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in focus. Most of the collection is centralized around Coray’s 1994 campaign to unseat Republican James V. Hansen from UT-01. Approximately ten total hours were spent sifting through the archive to understand the context of Coray’s campaign and how she presented her candidacy through electioneering technology. Ultimately, I settled on including relatively few artifacts in the present analysis to maintain a manageable scope. Two selection criteria were necessary for inclusion of each PxTC artifact discussed in this text: first, the artifact had to exemplify a genre of pre-digital campaign communication design (e.g., business card, brochure, yard sign, etc.); and second, the artifact had to maintain fidelity with the overall ethos of the *Coray for Congress* campaign (i.e., it had to be typical of other artifacts found in the archive but not included here for direct analysis).

Specifically, I analyze contents from boxes one, two, and four of the Bobbie Coray Papers which contain printed campaign materials and internal campaign communications that give context to the development of the materials. Written archivist permission was requested and granted for the reproduction of the images included in this manuscript. These images are cited and represented as figures where relevant, but it is important to acknowledge that what is included in this text is not exhaustive of the artifacts I examined, and which assuredly influenced my understanding of ideologies embedded in Coray’s campaign communications. To my knowledge, I am the first researcher to examine any portion of the Bobbie Coray Papers with the intention of publication.

Undoubtedly, there is more archival work to be done recovering Coray’s multiple campaigns and political experiences. However, because the purpose of this manuscript is to make a case for the potential of PxTC, the scope of archival inquiry is limited to admittedly convenient and non-exclusive examples. In the following sections, I analyze and discuss four dominant ideographs from the *Coray for Congress* campaign: <jobs>, <communities>, <families>, and <●○●>. Importantly, these ideographs are not exclusive to Coray’s campaign—in fact, the power of ideographs lies in part in their ubiquity. Driving this point home, it should not be difficult for a reader to find examples of these ideographs in much more recent and modern campaigns, which also means the insight offered in this case study should continue to be salient for some time to come.

<JOBS>, <COMMUNITIES>, <FAMILIES>,
<●●●>

Bobbie Coray's campaign slogan contains three broad ideographs that function separately and collectively: <jobs>, <communities>, and <families> (Figure 1). These words alone are vacuous and enthymematic—that is, they don't articulate a reasoned argument. Instead, they rely on the audience to associate each word with their own interpretation. This does not mean that the interpretations are random, in fact, what makes this practice politically useful is that each word is designed to invoke a larger sign system that taken as a whole constructs an ideology, or worldview, intended to stake common ground and goodwill between politicians and their constituents. Who could be against jobs, communities, and families? The ideograph draws in potential voters and is supported by subsequent textual and visual ideographs in a variety of materials.



Figure 1: Coray for Congress Bumper Sticker, “Jobs Communities Families.” Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422 Box 4, Folder 2). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

McGee (1980) wrote that “Human beings are ‘conditioned,’ not directly to belief and behavior, but to a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior or belief” (p. 6). The task of the critic conducting ideographic analysis then is to provide historical context to understand how particular ideographs function to invoke various ideologies through a contestation of language. A word by itself cannot do the work of ideology, but it can help to buttress ideological beliefs, condone ideological behavior, and encourage ideological adherence to a certain type of politics or to a political candidate. In contesting McGee's insistence that ideographs must be verbal, Edwards and Winkler (1997) argue that an image can transform into *representative form* when it “transcends the specifics of its immediate visual references and, through a cumulative process of visual and symbolic meaning, rhetorically identifies and delineates the ideals of the body politic” (p. 295). Images become ideographic when the cumulative process of meaning-making infuses recognizable societal ideals that convey and connect to identifiable ideologies.

Through this case study, I aim to illuminate how these ideographs are connected to problematic raced and gendered ideologies designed to connect with an electorate all too comfortable with structural oppression and the disempowerment of non-dominant communities. In this section, I will closely read various printed campaign materials in order to articulate the ideologies promoted by the 1994 *Coray for Congress* campaign. First, <jobs> is ambiguously linked to 90's era contestation over the transition from liberal to neoliberal ideology. Second, <communities> is linked to contestations over safety, the role of policing, and the ideology of law and order in a society panicked by abstract wars on poverty,

crime, and drugs. Third, <families> is linked to an ideology of heteropatriarchy shaken in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, feminist activism, and calls for LGBTQ equality. Finally, I will demonstrate how each of these ideologies are tied together through the use of color and design linked to an overarching ideology of nationalism.

<Jobs>: Designing for Neoliberalism

Campaigning in the mid-90's meant doing so in a climate of both economic growth and fear of unemployment as neoliberal ideology started to overtake liberal institutions through trade deals, outsourcing, and the corporatization of politics (Kotz, 2003). The term “neoliberalism” is often misunderstood and its use is contested in academic literature (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009), which means clarification is necessary to proceed with a common understanding. In this paper, liberalism can be understood as a socio-political-economic philosophy that subordinates the free market system to institutionalized democratic governance. In the United States, that has meant reigning in the excesses of corporations through the statutory authority of Congress and the administrative rule-making of the executive branch. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is the opposite—a socio-political-economic philosophy that subordinates the institutions of government to market forces. Neoliberal politicians espouse the benefits of globalization while denigrating and working to undermine regulatory constraints imposed on the market.

At the heart of the neoliberalism debate in the nineties was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that had passed in Congress in late 1993, shortly before Coray started her campaign. NAFTA significantly reduced trade barriers between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, which in turn allowed corporations to move manufacturing operations to areas where labor was cheaper and labor laws were less stringent. There was strong opposition to NAFTA rooted both in ethno-nationalist pride and the fear of losing jobs to foreign workers. Although it is difficult to know if Coray's opposition to NAFTA was a primary motivator for her run, her archive contains a response letter from Congressman Jim Hansen noting Coray's concerns over the trade deal (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 1, Folder 1). In addition to NAFTA, Utah's first district was still reeling from the effects of the Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, which according to a brochure mailer planning document in Coray's archive cost about 7,000 jobs between lost defense contracts and force reductions at Hill Air Force Base and the Toole Army Depot (USU_COLL, MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 4). By focusing on “Jobs” as a core part of her platform, Coray played on the economic anxiety of Utah's to leverage her identity as a job creator versus Hansen's record as a job loser.

The ideograph of <jobs> invokes the elasticity of the term and the contestation between liberal and neoliberal interpretations over where jobs come from, who they benefit, and what role the government should have in their creation. In Figure 2, <jobs> is used in two ways: first, as a brag about the role Coray played in job creation; and second, as a reference to the work of being a Congressional Representative in Washington. Notably, the imagery paired with the statement contains supporters sporting her red, white, and blue colors along with an American flag—linking the <job> ideograph to patriotic fervor. Identifying job creation with political work and American national identity is an invocation of liberal ideology that connects economic prosperity with patriotism. The message here is that the first job of an American politician

is to put American jobs first and to protect Americans from corporate outsourcing to less developed countries with weaker labor sectors—a sentiment that resonated with the conflicted public discourse surrounding NAFTA at the time (Johnson, 1994). In contrast, a neoliberal interpretation of the <jobs> ideograph would highlight the inevitability of globalized markets and make the case that increases in employment and prosperity are the result of non-protectionist policies that open borders to corporate movement.

<Communities>: Law and Order Politics

American politicians' use of militarized discourse to abstract and frame opposition to social harms (i.e., war on drugs, war on poverty, and war on crime) is a well-known phenomenon. Decades after their genesis, we are still coming to terms with the carceral logic and perverse effects this rhetoric has had on American civic life generally and minority communities more specifically (Hinton, 2016). A legacy of the Reagan-Bush era, the war on crime amped up during the early Clinton years in congressional debate over crime policy. An ideological narrowing occurred where left and right politicians adopted “get tough” rhetoric paired with “images of dangerous criminals [who were] cast in racial and class terms, with inner-city gangs and drugs rounding out that image” (Poveda, 1994, p. 79). Communities were characterized as under-siege

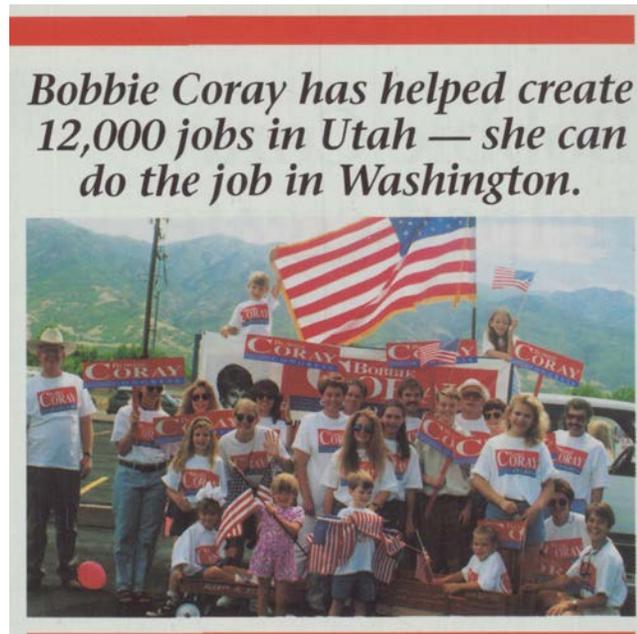


Figure 2: Upper-right frame of *Coray for Congress* brochure mailer, “Jobs.” Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 4). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

(despite falling crime rates) and non-carceral options like offender rehabilitation, drug legalization, and social welfare policies were discarded while mandatory sentencing minimums, expansion of death penalty offenses, and three strikes policies took prominence. Purging communities (and more specifically communities of color) of supposedly dangerous and pervasive criminality stemmed from a “law and order” ideology shared by members from both major parties and exemplified in the ideograph of <communities> found in the *Coray for Congress* campaign.

Coray embraced Clintonian rhetoric about the need for increased

policing and stricter crime policies to abate perceived escalations of youth violence. Figure 3 links community building to “tough on crime” proposals like sentence enhancements, trying youths as adults, and reducing procedural delays in death penalty cases. Figure 4 links concerns over unemployment and degradations in communal quality of life to “the shocking emergence of new youth crime and gun violence” (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 2). In other words, she is suggesting that harsh sentences for violent criminal youth, including even the death penalty, will benefit community development. There is little daylight between her stance on crime policy and those of her opponent Jim Hansen even though he, presumably in a partisan move, ultimately voted against the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Coray used Hansen’s nay vote against him by leaning in even

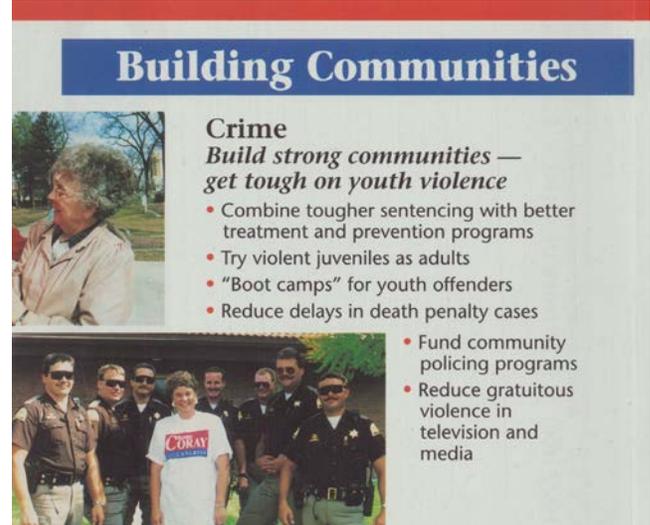


Figure 3: Upper-middle frame of *Coray for Congress* brochure mailer, “Building Communities.” Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 4). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

more on a law and order ideology, quoted in the *Deseret News* piece saying that “Jim Hansen talks tough on crime in Utah and votes soft on crime in Washington” (Coray, 1994, as quoted in Bernick Jr., 1994, para. 12). Many Republicans at the time voted against the bill likely to deny Clinton a win, but also substantively because they opposed some of the social programs and the assault weapons ban built into the bill. However, ideological commitment to a “tough on crime” and “law and order” society remained popular among Republican and Democratic constituencies, which is why Coray’s linkage between the ideograph of <communities> and the ideology of “law and order” politically potent.

The visual rhetoric in Figure 3 aligns well with the truncated platform articulated in the brochure. Coray is seen wearing a campaign t-shirt (with red, white, and blue coloring) in front of a group of mostly white male presenting cops (I cannot presume actual ethnicity or gender, but there is a striking lack of diversity represented in the photo). Many questions cannot be answered by this photo alone such as: was she endorsed by a police force or union? Do these particular officers support her campaign? What is the context for the photo? However, none of these questions matter to her primary audience for the brochure because the ideograph of <communities> is being visually linked to policing. The image is not meant to persuade an audience of the need for tougher policing,



Figure 4: Coray for Congress flyer, “It’s time for REAL change.” Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 2). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

it is meant to convey a shared “law and order” ideology between the candidate and her constituents. If a potential voter already believes that stricter crime policies and increased resources for policing

is necessary to guarantee the safety of their community, then the image is enthymematically persuasive—that is, it demonstrates a friendly association between Bobbie Coray and a (albeit random) group of police officers. Audience members can fill in the rest of the argument: if these cops take a smiling picture of themselves with Coray in a campaign t-shirt, then they must like her positions on crime policy. Cops are crime fighters, ergo Coray will be tough on crime.

<Families>: The Technical Communication of Heteropatriarchy

Analyzing the ideograph of <family values> in Clinton-era rhetoric, Dana Cloud (1998) argues that “the slogan’s ultimate motive is the privatization of social experience and responsibility” and that such “discourse conceals the reality of widespread economic inequality and structural racism in favor of personalistic explanations of hardship and failure” (p. 411). The ideology of the family extends beyond political affiliation into a larger structure of heteropatriarchy. The nuclear family (i.e., a heteronormative monogamous couple with children) has a privileged role in American society because it has helped to maintain the social, economic, and political dominance of white men. As general consciousness of oppression has increased, the role of the nuclear family in maintaining white cis-male dominance has become clearer. Politics in the 1980’s and 1990’s must be understood in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, stonewall riots, civil rights activism, and anti-war protests that marked the general societal unrest of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Backlash to liberatory social movements sought to refocus public sentiment away from structural analysis of oppression and onto personalized causes of disobedience and mistrust of authority. Degeneration of the nuclear family became a favorite scapegoat of politicians across the political spectrum.

The appeal to the nuclear family is especially powerful in UT-01, where members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) have always represented an electoral majority. In an article notably published the same year as Coray’s election, Mormon feminist scholar Erin Silva (1994) argues that the ecclesiastical structures of LDS culture are built “to conform with deeper cultural blueprints of patriarchy” (p. 149). Historically, LDS church and members stances on polygamy could be read in opposition to the nuclear family (although not in opposition to patriarchy). However, as Utah sought statehood, LDS institutions worked to distance their culture from polygamist practice by positing the faith as a bulwark for the white nuclear family. This helps to explain the church’s strong stances against marriage equality, trans rights, and ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Coray’s own membership in the LDS church likely helped her campaign resonate with more constituents in UT-01 even if the dominance of patriarchal culture ultimately doomed her chances of electoral success in the district. The following PxTC artifacts demonstrate the campaigns awareness of and attempt to leverage dominant cultural preferences for the nuclear family.

Bobbie Coray’s use of the ideograph <families> alone doesn’t make the fear-mongering case about the degeneration of family values, instead it does rely on the heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family. Figure 5 is an excerpt of the layout instructions for the Coray for Congress brochure mailer and Figure 6 is a mockup of the layout. The photo descriptions combined with the suggested text reveal the ideological underpinnings of Coray’s understanding of family. She employs the rhetoric of reproductive futurism

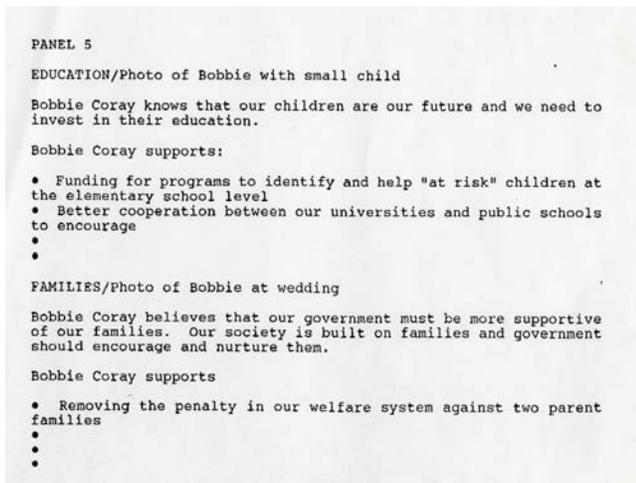


Figure 5: Brochure layout instructions: Panel 5. Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 4). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

(Edelman, 2004) to argue that “our children are our future” and pairs it with a photo of “Bobbie with a small child” (Figure 5). The message is that those without children (for a myriad of reasons including sterility, non-heteronormative relationship excluded from adoption services, or personal choice) have no stake in the future—they are excluded from it. Leaving little doubt about the implications of her messaging choices, the layout instructions also argue that “Our society is built on families and government should encourage and nurture them” with a paired image instruction of “Photo of Bobbie at wedding” (Figure 5). To be clear, the wedding photo that was used in the final brochure was from her daughter’s (heteronormative) wedding.

In Coray’s depictions, American society is not built on just any family—it is the product of white heterosexual coupling that constitutes the ideal American nuclear family. Figure 6 follows up with a title for panel 5 that links a “Building a Healthier and Safer Utah” to these problematic conceptions of the nuclear family without a substantive warrant for why that would be the case. Coray does not need a warrant though because the ideograph of <families> is contextualized by the ideological adherence to heteropatriarchy in American society that privileges a very narrow ideal of family as the foundation of a healthy and safe community. Coray does not need to explicitly scapegoat in order for her audience to understand the implication of her argument. Non-normative family structures are to blame for social and civil unrest—their existence makes Utah less healthy and less safe. The policy side of her argument is also made clear in Figure 5 that the government’s role should not be to prop up dysfunctional families through the welfare system, it should be to nurture the growth of nuclear families. Constituents who feel threatened and left behind by social change would have an easy time adhering to Coray’s heteronormative messaging and use of the <families> ideograph because of a pre-existing ideological commitment to heteropatriarchy.

<●○●>: Ideographic Qualities of Color Choices

Collectively the ideographs of <jobs>, <communities>, and <families> are tied together through the communication design of Coray’s printed campaign materials. Color, in particular, aids in this

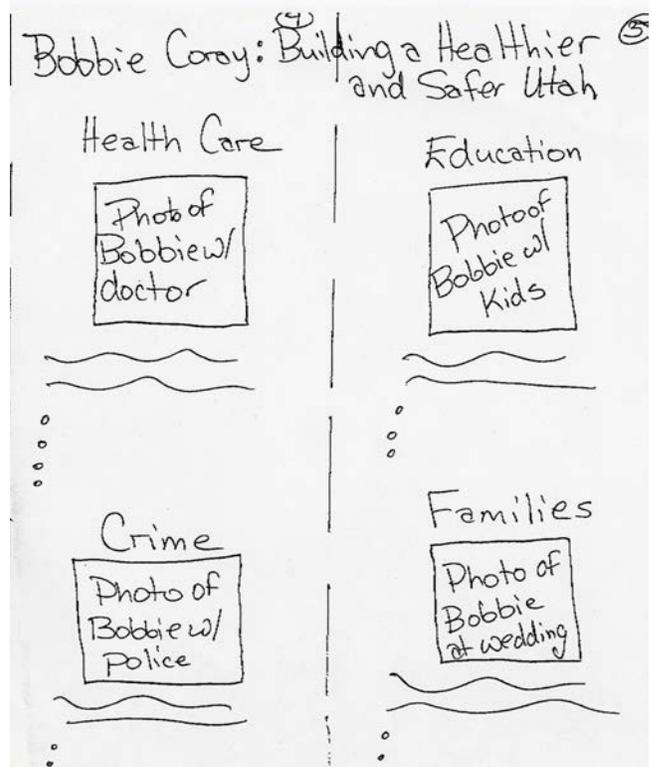


Figure 6: Brochure layout mock-up: Panel 5. Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 4). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

association through the visual ideograph of <●○●> that invokes an ideology of patriotism. It is important to note that the *Coray for Congress* campaign is not unique in this invocation. Many politicians use red, white, and blue coloring in their campaigns to connect their bid for office to a broader sense of nationalism shared by the electorate. The elasticity of color in communication design means it can be abstracted yet still tied to its original meaning. In this case, that is the use of American flag colors, even without the flag itself, to mark the patriotism of a political candidate. Color represents American national identity. Edwards and Winkler (1997) argue that when images “become a discourse fragment that multiple publics appropriate for diverse purposes” (p. 297) then that image transgresses descriptive form and becomes ideographic. So too, I argue, does the use of discrete communication design techniques such as the coloring of printed campaign materials. Figure 7 is a business card that contains little more than a simple logo design, reiterated name of the candidate, and contact information. Notably absent is any verbal messaging, but that does not mean that the card does not pertain to the larger ecosystem of materials distributed for the purpose of electing Bobbie Coray to Congress.

Although there are some exceptions to the red, white, and blue coloring pattern (such as the prominent use of yellow on a yard sign) contained in Coray’s archive, they appear to be atypical. The examples contained in this text are more representative of the predominant coloring choices made by the campaign. The brochure mailer, other yard signs, bumper stickers, etc. make ample use of the simplistic yet malleable red, white, and blue coloring. Color becomes a contestation for candidates to vie for the patriotic identity of themselves and their platforms. At stake is the meaning

of what it means to be an American. By employing national colors in advertising materials, candidates implicitly associate their messaging with patriotism. Uses of color are buoyed by the historical association of red, white, and blue with the flag as well as the explicit picturing of flags in candidate photos such as what is depicted in Figure 2. This use of coloring and visual imagery is effective because of the affective attachment that those invested in patriotic ideology have to the combination of red, white, and blue especially when it comes to politics. The public wants to elect a patriot and other color choices, although they may help a candidate stand out, may dissociate the candidate from patriotism.

The ideologies of neoliberalism, law and order, and heteropatriarchy are linked together by the coloring ideograph of <●○●> which is featured prominently throughout Coray's (and many others past and present) campaign messaging. Patriotism is a powerful ideological commitment even though its meaning is often contested. In Coray's formulation of ideographs, being American means a commitment to market logic, heavy handed policing, and the nuclear family. Color helps make the argument that Coray is a patriot and her platform is patriotic. However, patriotism is also a violent ethno-nationalist ideology rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, classism, and patriarchy. Politicians who rely on the rally around the flag effect in American politics must be challenged on the incredibly problematic implications of patriotic identification. Otherwise, there is a mutually reinforcing effect of nationalistic constituent beliefs and candidate messaging constructs that will continue to

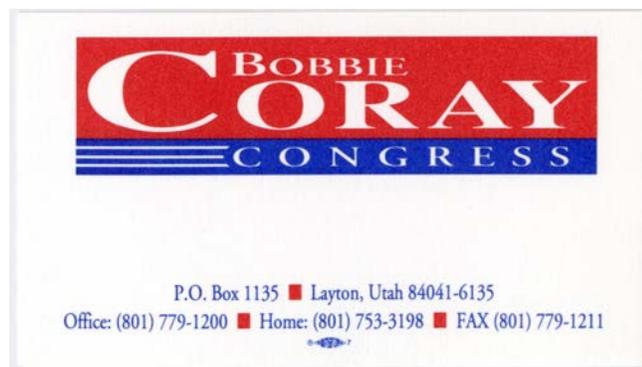


Figure 7: Coray for Congress business card. Bobbie Coray Papers (USU_COLL MSS 422, Box 4, Folder 2). Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections & Archives.

promote ethnocentric attitudes, values, and behavior among the American electorate.

TAKEAWAYS FOR PRACTITIONERS, EDUCATORS, AND SCHOLARS

In this article, I set out to accomplish three goals:

- 1) Explore PxTC as a sphere of inquiry for communication design scholars.
- 2) Demonstrate the ideographic power of communication design in order to encourage practitioners to be cognizant of the ideologies they design for.
- 3) Make a case for studying the genre of electioneering technology.

As explained in this text, PxTC focused research is not new—it is an existing trend of technical communication work that I argue could benefit from more formal recognition and coherence. In the process of naming and exploring PxTC in the context of communication design, I hope to invite more inquiry into the role that our field can play in electoral politics. Practitioners are already doing political communication design work, but as I hope this case study demonstrates, technical communication educators and scholars can aid in fomenting ideologically aware communication design practices. Democratic electoral politics would benefit from the rhetorical expertise and unique skillsets of technical communicators and the discipline would benefit from formalizing such an interdisciplinary commitment. Additionally, encouraging increased student engagement with electoral politics pairs well with programmatic commitments to social justice.

The final important task of this article is to extend the genre-defining work of Dorpenyo & Agboka (2018), who effectively characterize the technical communication properties of election technology, which is primarily concerned with the administration of elections. In contrast, electioneering technology is concerned with the performance of partisan advocacy during elections, a distinction that offers novel routes for future PxTC inquiry. More scholarly attention should be attuned to the communication design of electioneering technology in order to better understand the persuasive connection between the messaging choices candidates make and the adherence of electorates to those messages.

Coray's campaign, like most contemporary campaigns, rely on ideographs (McGee, 1980) to invoke ideological adherence to the candidate and platform. <Jobs> invokes contestation over liberal institutions and neoliberal economic reform in an era marked by debates over free trade and ethnocentric fear of foreigners undermining the stability of American employment. <Communities> alludes to the threat of chaos held back by overwhelmed law enforcement agencies in need of stricter, even if harmful, law and order policies. <Families> is a dog-whistle to Americans caught up in a moral panic that scapegoats non-normative familial relationships to prop up heteropatriarchal values perceived as essential to the safety and prosperity of the republic. These ideographs are tied together through the consistent coloring scheme ideograph <●○●> that links Coray's candidacy and platform to nationalist ideology and identity.

For practitioners, this case study highlights the importance of ideologically aware communication design in electioneering technology. Technical communicators working on campaigns should take away from this text the need to be aware of how design choices may, intentionally or not, implicate their candidates in the pervasive problematic ideologies of an electorate. Designers should become more cognizant of how even discrete layout and coloring choices can buttress structural oppression by playing on pre-existing prejudices and fears for electoral gain. Educators should be interested in the possibilities that PxTC offers for new emphases, tracks, and course programing. Indeed, more explicit disciplinary commitment to exploring the intersections between politics and technical communication may help to further ground social justice advocacy in the classroom. Finally, for scholars, this case study theorizes new interdisciplinary possibilities for PxTC work, especially in analyzing and teasing out the implications of election and electioneering related technologies. There is critically important work to be done on behalf of Democracy and our field has a significant role to play if it so chooses. PxTC research can

inform PxTC advocacy to improve electoral outcomes and make material gains in the struggle for social justice, so let's get to work.

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