



Jeff Greenfield, left, a political analyst with ABC Television, shares a light moment with Ms. Barbara Cawley, special assistant to Sister Mary Reap, I.H.M., Marywood president, and Dr. Michael Foley of the college's Cultural Affairs Committee, prior to speaking on campus.

## ABC analyst brings wit to politics

Pat Mellody, a student of Marywood's Communication Arts Program, had the chance to interview Jeff Greenfield before he spoke on campus.

ABC News political and media analyst Jeff Greenfield describes himself as the guy who enters through a back door and helps people understand things. He is charismatic, bringing his own dash of wit and humor to a profession which has the tendency to be severely serious. His job is to make a complicated, tedious issue seem like a conversation at the dinner table.

Jeff Greenfield did not start in television. After graduating from Yale Law School, he became a free lance writer and one of his favorite topics was television. In 1979, CBS needed a media critic for a

for Senator Bob Kennedy and has had articles published in such outlets as *Harper's* and *National Lampoon*.

His advice to those trying to break into the field is very pragmatic. "I would not aspire to do this. The people who are most successful at it are those who started in print such as George Will or Mark Shields. It is easier because print gives you a broader base to writer about politics than a 40-second package does."

Mr. Greenfield has been assigned numerous fascinating stories over the years including the Soviet Coup, the Thomas and Gates hearings, the plight of South Africa and the release of Nelson Mandela. He is presently working on a piece concerning the plight of urban black youths.

He makes it clear he is not a conservative.

# Greenfield Discusses American Politics

by Stephen Scalse

ABC News' Jeff Greenfield addressed a large audience in Marywood's Performing Arts Center Oct. 4, discussing the controversial role of the media in American Politics.

Presented by the Cultural Affairs Committee, Greenfield began his hour-long speech, stating, "Most of my colleagues disagree with what I am going to tell you."

"In fact," he added, "What most people think about politics and media is wrong." Greenfield, a political news analyst, argued that TV has changed American politics less than is thought.

As he called it, "The Myth of Media Power discommits people from politics," forcing them to think that "politics is a spectator's sport ... you can watch but you can't play." This is a myth, Greenfield emphasized, adding that "TV is just the stage where politics is played out."

In detail, Greenfield, an Emmy Award winner, argued against certain myths:

**MYTH #1:** TV has forced political candidates to maintain a strong posture of being homey, yet sophisticated. Greenfield argued that posture has always been in determinant for candidates, but that T.V. has merely changed the form in which candidates are presented. Instead of giving two hours speeches as they did in the last century, candidates are exposed in short 30 second commercials.

**MYTH #2:** TV emphasizes a candidate's appearance, because they receive a lot of air time on the news, such as the Nixon/Kennedy debate in 1960. Greenfield asserted that appearance has always been important to the American public, adding that George Washington was

**MYTH #3:** TV has brought about political mudslinging. "To believe this," Greenfield said, "Is an exercise in ignorance." Mudslinging has always existed in American politics," he said.

In refutation, Greenfield urged, "Something else is going on," stating that TV does not have the power that some people think, but rather the American choose their candidates from a spectrum of informative bases. As an example, Greenfield argued that "If TV influences election outcomes so greatly, then why are voter turnouts dropping instead of rising ... something else is going on."

Additionally, Greenfield said that constituents have the power in politics, not the media. He said the public determines what will be viewed as important enough for the media to cover, not the candidates. He further argued that political debates on TV have virtually no impact on voter response.

In conclusion to his speech, Greenfield listed the following factors for the outcome of national elections: 1) the economy; 2) the unemployment rate; 3) state of foreign affairs; 4) state of disrest on domestic social issues.

"Bush may be popular now, being a war-victory president," Greenfield predicted, "But it won't do a damn bit of difference if the economy goes south in 1992."

Greenfield discussed other political conditions in America, such as the disappearance of the Democratic majority, the diminishing power of labor unions, and the demographic shift in the suburban America.

Jeff Greenfield's speech at the Greenfield

one of his favorite topics was television. In 1979, CBS needed a media critic for a new Sunday morning show and Greenfield seemed the perfect match.

He evolved into an image maker (or manipulator of the media) for political candidates, one of his credits being the successful bid of Tom Bradley for Los Angeles mayor. He also was a speech writer

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the plight of urban black youths.

He makes it clear he is not a correspondent and has never covered the Hill nor the White House. Even though he has substituted for Ted Koppel in the anchor position on "Nightline," he has no intentions of moving in that direction. "An anchor is a specialized position requiring special skills. I love what I am doing right now."

ways been important to the American public, adding that George Washington was six-feet tall. "We want someone who reflects confidence," Greenfield said.

America.

In a final moment of truth, Greenfield said that "TV's coverage of American politics is superficial and ineffective."

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