

The process of politics

The Election Game And How to Win It

By Joseph Napolitan.

300 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$6.95.

The New How to Win an Election

By Stephen C. Shadegg.

189 pp. New York: Taplinger Publishing Company.

Cloth, \$6.50. Paper, \$2.95.

By **JEFF GREENFIELD**

It's all Theodore White's fault. Ever since the enormous success of "The Making of the President, 1960," reporters have been pushing aside the curtains of the political process, probing the performances of stagehands, directors, lighting engineers and wardrobe mistresses. This fascination with the process of politics—the "election game," in Joe Napolitan's revealing phrase—has almost dominated the reporting of politics. We are likely to know more about Hubert Humphrey's pancake makeup in the coming weeks than Hubert Humphrey's position on the war.

In recent years, the operators themselves have begun to set down their own techniques

Jeff Greenfield, a speechwriter and consultant for Garth Associates in New York, is co-author of "A Populist Manifesto."

and views on the political machinery. (I joined this trend by helping Jerry Bruno write "The Advance Man," a book whose prediction of a Lindsay Presidency has the distinction of being the first flatly wrong prognosis of 1972.) As these books by two noted political consultants suggest, we are likely to be either amused or bored by the stories they tell and the techniques they reveal. But more important, we are likely to miss a crucial fact about politics if we continue to involve ourselves with the how-it's-done aspect of politics rather than the why-it's-done.

Both Stephen Shadegg and Joe Napolitan are "consultants"—men who join a political campaign either out of dedication, or for a price (up to \$25,000 in Napolitan's case), or both and offer advice on what to say, how to say it, how to organize canvassers, media and speechmaking. Their politics are polar: Sha-

June 1, 72

The New York Times Book Review

degg works for conservative Republicans like Barry Goldwater, Karl Mundt, Henry Dworshak and Paul Fanin, while Napolitan works, as he puts it, for "Democrats I like." He helped Alaska's Mike Gravel take Ernest Gruening's Senate seat, worked with Milton Shapp in Pennsylvania during his 1966 governorship bid, and struggled to put Hubert Humphrey's 1968 Presidential campaign together after the debacle at Chicago.

Their political differences, however, do not extend to their professional viewpoints. Shadegg and Napolitan agree on basic campaign strategies: Find a campaign manager who is the undisputed boss, and who can make tough decisions; define your candidate's message simply, sharply and consistently; use polls as indicators, not as oracles.

The distinction between the books is simply put: Shadegg's is staggeringly unreadable; Napolitan's is essentially lively, contentious and informative. This is not a consequence of their politics. Conservatives like Clifton White and Bill Buckley have both written amusing books on campaigns, while Eugene McCarthy's "The Year of the People" reads like a government report on soy bean futures.

It's just that Shadegg's "The New How to Win an Election" is a (not very) updated version of a 1958 book which talks mostly about campaigns in the Southwest during the early 1950's. The Vietnam war, the civil-rights movement, the Goldwater and McCarthy-Kennedy campaigns, go almost unmentioned; instead, we are told how to put Burma-Shave style billboards along Arizona highways to elect a sheriff, and a melange of philosophical discourse like this:

"Our long accepted Judeo-Christian concept of the nature of man has been effectively challenged by the doctrines of Marx and Engels. If . . . we are to march forward together into a better tomorrow. . . ."

Instant Nytol.

It is Napolitan's "The Election Game" that raises the more serious questions, because it is an account of politics by a man who likes what he does and is proud of it. By his own account, Napolitan is a professional, a man who says, "I have no interest in government and don't know anything about it. . . . My interest is in the political process, the challenge of trying to elect a man to office, with a preference for taking on a candidate who isn't supposed to win and winning with him."

This is the classic "professional" view of a job: the difficult challenge, the odds

against success, the achievement through the use of skill, guts, and (as Napolitan recognizes) luck. Indeed, Napolitan and some of his fellow consultants have taken the "professional" aspect of their work a step further, forming an American and an international Association of Political Consultants, and publishing a journal called *Politeia*.

I know the sense that Napolitan has of politics, because I've been in it, as a speechwriter and a consultant. His description of the excitement of the game, the thrill of achievement, is accurate. And that's the problem. Sooner or later a political consultant has to face the same questions any professional does—to what end are skills to be employed?

Is a lawyer who faces the challenge of winning a tax exemption for a major corporation a successful professional? Is an architect who designs the project that obliterates a stable, working-class neighborhood an achiever? Is the crisis manager who helps a government overthrow a pesky radical regime in Latin America a "winner"? By some standards—wealth, power, fame—the answer is yes. But the history of the 1960's is in good measure a history of throwing such assumptions into serious doubt.

This is, then, especially true in politics, where the consequences of such "success" may be disastrous. Putting an inexperienced candidate into office may take special skills—but the fact is that candidate then becomes a figure with great power over the lives of millions of citizens. What he or she does with that power is a question that lies at the heart of politics; and it cannot be ignored by indifference.

Further, the nexus between a candidate's intentions about real issues and political success may be greater than political professionals realize. One reason I so badly misjudged the strength of George McGovern was that I forgot what brought me into politics in the first place: the urgent desire to change the course of the country. The thousands of people who worked for McGovern did so because they wanted a different kind of country. And that commitment explains much of his success in the primaries. People who spend all of their time working in politics tend to forget that kind of strength, assuming instead that the absence of conventional political "pluses" automatically dooms a campaign.

"The Election Game" is an instructive look at how politics works. It will tell the interested onlooker how the process works. But it will tell him, also, the limits of viewing politics "professionally." ■