

## Reflections of the Class of 1987

**By Paul Tarricone**

1984—Ronald Reagan, Walter Mondale, Jesse Jackson, Geraldine Ferraro, Gary Hart, Morning in America, and “Where’s the Beef?”

The presidential election of 1984 represented the first campaign that the Class of '87 would experience outside the bubble of our parents' homes and opinions, and away from our home towns with their own political predispositions. More importantly, this was the first presidential election in which we, the F&M Class of '87, could vote.

For the politically engaged at F&M (which meant most of us), we were finally players in the drama with a ballot to cast. And we took that responsibility seriously. Very seriously.

During the election season, Ralph Nader (who at that time was still a consumer advocate and not a presidential candidate) visited the campus and compared Reagan's “Morning in America” ad campaign to the banality of a beer commercial. Some in the audience nodded their agreement; others took exception. After Nader's lecture, we continued the debate during the walk back to the dorms--18-year-old conservatives and liberals arguing the finer points of how the media influences our campaigns. (Sounds strangely familiar, right?)

In the spring of '84, I remember another conversation with a hall mate who went to great lengths to acquire an absentee ballot to vote in the New York State Democratic Primary. The youthful Gary Hart was the darling of the college crowd, so we all wondered why this particular student opted for Walter Mondale. “Look past the glamour,” he said, pointing out Mondale's stronger pro-union record.

That spring, there were other nights at our communal table in the area adjoining the Mull and Muhlenberg Halls where students of all political stripes would gather and debate whether President Reagan had earned another four years. The conversations got heated, but no one took it too personally, and part of the fun was the intellectual exercise of crafting a logical argument and scoring a few points.

Summer came and went. Geraldine Ferraro was selected as the first female vice presidential candidate and both parties carried on with their conventions and campaigns.

As our sophomore year began and the election approached on November 6, 1984, we applied for absentee ballots and dutifully cast our votes in advance. The larger meaning was that we had officially reached adulthood in the political sense: From that point forward, we would have a voice in the direction of our country.

Election night, of course, proved anti-climactic. Sixteen years before hanging chads, nail-biter elections and the Blue State-Red State map, President Reagan swept to the biggest landslide in U.S. history. But the months leading up to that night—which cut across both our freshman and sophomore years—helped shape us all.