

Scoring Guide: 6 (Actual total score: 11, i.e. it got a "6" from one grader and a "5" from the other.)

Being selected "Man of the Year" by Time magazine is a singular honor. It represents a large body of opinion about the influence a man or woman has had during a certain year, although it may represent the culmination of a lifetime of influence. Past recipients include Presidents, Popes and movie stars as well as people more notorious than famous, such as Hitler and Stalin. Some of their names are recognized for generations while others slip into obscurity. Who will this year's recipient be? 1992 has been a year of startling events in many parts of the world. Eastern Europe is suddenly embroiled in a civil war long thought over. Yet from that revolution no single name comes to mind. It seems to have been a group of people's suppressed antipathies raised to violence.

Financial crises have plagued the United States and spread to Japan as well as other areas of the world. Out of this morass no single name arises this year. It all seems more a tumbled house of cards dislodged by former recognized names such as a Keating and Boesky.

In the political arena, where people of renown abound, ennui pervaded until about six months ago. One evening on a talk show a brash Texan was asked by an interviewer whether he would run for the Presidency of the United States. His oft-quoted answer was that if the people of the country gave him a clear message he would do so.

Thus began the rise of H. Ross Perot, my candidate for "Man of the Year." How ironic that it began with a typically media construct where Mr. Perot spouses the "down home" family values. No stranger to the political arena, he has preferred to remain behind the scenes nationally with the exception of his role in the hostage release of 1973.

Almost overnight supporters began opening offices, distributing buttons and most importantly gathering the needed signatures to have Mr. Perot placed on the ballot in each state. As the clock stacked away and newscasters shared the results of state primaries through the spring and summer, momentum built.

News and talk show hosts competed wildly for interviews. Some were disappointed by lack of success in getting Perot, but others were disappointed at the lack of a specific platform. Without obligation to party platform, I felt excited that we might really see change--the catchword up to this point. I was also willing to give him a little time to do research on the one or two issues he might choose to spearhead before declaring his unique solutions.

Meanwhile, he was asked quite predictably to comment about a penology of topics from hiring homosexuals to breakfast cereal preferences. It is curious how Americans value individuality until one becomes a public figure, at that time it is expected that neutral positions be established that please everyone but reflect little individuality.

Out of this process a new energy was noted among the ordinary citizen regarding politics. Suddenly people knew a new name, and felt interested in values, which caused President Bush and Democratic Candidate Bill Clinton to follow Perot's eclectic utterances with responses, and generally livened things up.

Things were going well but gradually momentum began to slow. Where was the platform? General concepts of political and family values, a "putting out fires" approach to the serious

problems facing the country, and a somewhat detached view to the poor and disenfranchised, was feeling hollow. Yet thousands of volunteers were working valiantly on his behalf.

Without warning or explanation except a vague "for the good of the country" H. Ross Perot decided to quit. His supporters were appalled. Renowned public relations experts had been dismissed. What happened? We'll probably never know. Dan Quayle, who called him a "temperamental tycoon," now, says "I was right." Was that it? Others suggest political or family blackmail.

The fact is that H. Ross Perot raised the consciousness of many Americans, shook up an otherwise flaccid race for the most powerful office in the nation and having done so will always stand out to me as the "Man of the Year" this year. If selected one wonders if his name will reemerge in the future, or will this have been Perot's year and will his public persona vanish to the recesses of his Texas home.