

TEACHER GUIDE

The Dean Scream: De-legitimizing a Candidate

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2002, Howard Dean, a physician and former Governor of Vermont, announced he would seek the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination. He distinguished himself from the other Democratic candidates by boldly criticizing Bush’s tax cuts and the war in Iraq. The Dean campaign made unprecedented use of the Internet as a campaign tool. He used the new medium to break fundraising records and to reach young voters.

Dean’s criticisms of Bush resonated with many Democratic voters and he was the Democratic frontrunner going into the Iowa Caucus and the New Hampshire primary. Despite his lead, many media outlets ran articles questioning his electability. One week before the Iowa vote, *Newsweek* ran a cover article titled “All the Rage: Dean’s Shoot-from-the-Hip Style and Shifting Views Might Doom Him in November.”

Dean came in third in Iowa, behind John Kerry and John Edwards. At a speech to his campaign workers following the caucus, Dean rallied his supporters and listed the primaries that he hoped to go on to win. You will watch a short video clip from that speech. What impressions do you get from Dean in this speech?

> **Play** the video clip available at www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/2004.

QUESTION	What does this short video clip from Howard Dean’s speech to his campaign workers in Iowa tell you about the candidate? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Dean is upbeat, energetic and positive in rallying his supporters to keep fighting for his campaign.
EVIDENCE	claims of future battles (see speech text to right) and victories (“and then we are going to Washington D.C. to take back the White House”; raising his voice; yelling; finger pointing; smiling; confident look



Dean’s January 12, 2004 Speech in Iowa Video Clip
Length: 2 min. 33 sec.

Speech text:
Well, you guys, you have already got the picture here. I was about to say, you know, I’m sure there are some disappointed people here. You know what? You know something? You know something? If you had told us one year ago that we
(Continued on next page)

QUESTION

Which of the following excerpts from newspaper articles better describes the scene?

1. Dean’s “gravely voice, (was) barely audible over the din of the applause inside the 70’s style disco hall.” *Los Angeles Times* 1/13/04
- 2: “his face beet-red, (Dean) punched his fist in the air and spoke in a near-guttural roar.” *Los AngelesTimes* 1/14/04

were going to come in third in Iowa we would have given anything for that. And you know something? You know something? Not only are we going to New Hampshire ... We’re going to South Carolina and Oklahoma and Arizona and North Dakota and New Mexico. We’re going to California and Texas and New York. We’re going to South Dakota and Oregon and Washington and Michigan. And then we’re going to Washington D.C. to take back the White House. We will not give up. We will not give up in New Hampshire. We will not give up in South Carolina. We will not give up in Arizona or New Mexico, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan. We will not quit now or ever. We want our country back for ordinary Americans.

> **Explain** that you will now play a brief audio only clip from that same speech.



Dean’s January 12, 2004 Speech in Iowa Audio-only Clip
Length: 13 sec.

> **Play** the audio–only version of the speech available at www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/2004.

QUESTION

Describe the difference between what you heard in the video and what you heard in the short audio clip from the same speech.

SUGGESTED ANSWER

The video version has loud cheers from the audience with Dean yelling above the crowd. The audio version eliminates most of the crowd sounds and emphasizes the intensity of Dean’s voice.

EVIDENCE

the video includes the background sound of cheering and chanting that prompted Dean to yell louder while the audio-only version nearly eliminated the background cheers, artificially isolating Dean’s voice

QUESTION

Which version is a more accurate recording of the actual event?

SUGGESTED ANSWER

The video records much more closely what the people in the audience heard and saw.

> **Explain:** The microphone that Dean used filtered out the sound of the crowd, unnaturally accentuating his voice. Over the next week the distorted sound bite of his hoarse yell was played nearly a thousand times on network news, cable TV and radio stations across the nation. It became known as “the Dean Scream.” Late night TV hosts cracked jokes about it and MTV.com and NPR played online remixes of the speech layered with music from the Aphex Twins and Ozzy Osborne.

Many media outlets used the sound bite to present Dean as overly aggressive, emotional and unpresidential. These impressions reinforced polls that showed Dean as a weaker candidate against President Bush than more seasoned politicians including John Kerry. The negative impression given by the media coverage is credited with helping to derail Dean’s campaign. He dropped out of the race on February 18 without winning any primaries.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Coverage of the Dean speech spun wildly in the week following the Iowa caucus. Reporters who were present typically noted Dean’s hoarse voice and high energy. Over the next few days, as the taped version of the “the scream” circulated, media coverage called Dean and his speech as “almost frenzied” (Washington Post), a “tirade” (Today), “an emotional meltdown” (L.A. Times), and a “primal scream” (NY Times). By the weekend many media outlets were using his speech as evidence that he was not fit to become President of the United States. For more newspaper coverage see Bryan Keefer’s article “Spin Buster” from the *Columbia Journalism Review* at www.campaigndesk.org/archives/000051.asp.

Tuesday, January 13, 2004

“His voice raspy, Dean...shouted to supporters, ‘We are not only going to New Hampshire,’ then hoarsely listed at least a dozen states that hold contests in the next few months.” - Patricia Wilson, *Reuters*

(Dean) “roared to his supporters, in an arm-waving, voice-booming appearance that seemed like a victory address.” - John Harris, *Washington Post*

“Dean bounced onto stage, high-fiving supporters with a wide grin and waving an American flag. He looked determined not to appear disappointed.” - Nedra Picker, *AP*

Wednesday, January 14, 2004

“...a roaring, raucous concession speech that many opponents have held up as evidence that Dr. Dean is unfit to be president.” - Adam Nagourney and Jodi Wilgoren, *The New York Times*

Thursday, January 15, 2004

“For many viewers, including some who had previously supported Dean, the moment seemed to offer a glimpse into the candidate’s soul – and most did not like what they saw. It seemed to portray a man full of rage and lacking in self-restraint.” - *The New York Times*

Friday, January 16, 2004

Dean’s “finger jabbing concession speech, punctuated by a surprising scream, has turned him into fodder for late-night comics and raised questions about his emotional stability ever among his own supporters.” - Glen Johnson, *The Boston Globe*

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Was it appropriate for media coverage of “the Dean Scream” to influence the presidential primaries?

What role does the media play in determining which candidates are legitimate and which are not? Is this appropriate?

CONNECTIONS

In 1988 Jesse Jackson came out of the Super Tuesday primaries with more votes than any other Democratic candidate yet mainstream media outlets did not take his candidacy seriously. *Newsweek's* cover of March 21 was titled, “The Power Broker – What Jesse Jackson Wants.” See the lesson for decoding this cover and polling data from the *Media Construction of Presidential Campaigns* Kit on the Project Look Sharp website: www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/2004.



Newsweek Cover,
Jesse Jackson