

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 1840 DOC. #2: *The Log Cabin* Newspaper Banner

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the 21st century, the owners and editors of newspapers and television news stations have a lot of power in determining the information that voters receive about a candidate during a presidential campaign. This was equally true in 1840 when campaign news reporting helped to shape the image of retired General William Henry Harrison into that of the common man’s hero.

“Spin” is a modern term used to describe how a bit of “news” can be turned from a negative impact to a positive one by a skillful information manager. “Spin” is not a new process, as you can see from this next example. The Whig campaign managers took the remark that was reported in the opposition newspaper as a slam against Harrison and “spun” it to create the Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign theme that would become a national sensation. The “Log Cabin Campaign” of 1840 became a model for future campaigns.

“Spin” often involves playing around with the truth. Harrison’s campaign managers portrayed him as a regular frontiersman who had become a hero through his military service. In reality he had been born on a large Virginia plantation, the son of a wealthy signer of the Declaration of Independence. The Whig campaign accused Van Buren of being an upper-class snob while Harrison himself lived a very comfortable life on his large estate in North Bend, Ohio.

The Whig Party created a chain of “Log Cabin” campaign newspapers to report on General Harrison’s heroic exploits in the military. The papers also promoted all the fun to be had on the Whig campaign trail with mass parties that included big crowds, plenty of music, and lots of hard cider or whiskey. During this campaign Philadelphia distiller E.C. Booz marketed his “Log Cabin Whiskey” in bottles shaped like log cabins and “booze” became a synonym for alcohol.

The Whig Party newspapers were part of the new “penny press” that carried news of candidates to workers and trades people for the first time. Most newspapers at that time were directed at the upper classes and were beyond the means of most workers because they were only available by subscription. At the height of the campaign the circulation of the Whig papers was nearly 80,000 copies, a huge number in those days.

> **Project 1840 doc. #2a.**

QUESTION	<b>Who was the target audience for this newspaper? Why do you think so?</b>
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The target audience consisted of Whig party members and sympathizers, farmers, voters of humble origins or those drawn to the frontier.
EVIDENCE	the title and image of log cabin; a frontier farmer beneath the Harrison campaign flag

**1840 DOC. #2a**



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***The Log Cabin*  
Newspaper Banner**

**PowerPoint Slide**

> Project 1840 doc. #2b.

QUESTION **What messages about the candidate are presented in this image? What evidence do you have?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Harrison is a hard-working man of simple means who enjoys his hard cider. He lives in peace with Native Americans on the new American frontier.

EVIDENCE farmer plowing next to a log cabin with cider keg; Native American teepees in the background, forest in the background; "Harrison and Tyler" flag overhead

QUESTION **What information about Harrison is left out of this image?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Harrison was the son of aristocracy and lived on an estate, not a log cabin.

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

Can you think of information sources today that use "spin" in a similar way?

Does the process of "spinning" the news to favor a candidate encourage or discourage political involvement by the public?

**CONNECTIONS**

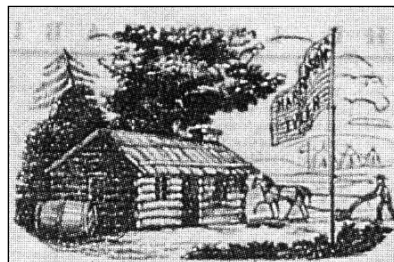
(see thematic listing)

**"Commoner"**

**Media Bias**

**Target Audience** (frontiersmen)  
 Newspapers in the early 19th century were typically party organs with an explicitly partisan editorial position. Today's periodicals typically try to appear non-partisan. Compare *The Log Cabin* newspaper banner with *Newsweek's* cover during the disputed election of 2000 (2000 doc. #13). Why might *Newsweek* want to appear neutral and unbiased? Is this a good thing?

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**Banner - Center Illustration**

**PowerPoint Slide**

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

In 1840 a young man named Horace Greeley was named as editor of the Whig's lead newspaper, *The Log Cabin*, by the Whig Party's campaign manager. Greeley was highly successful in using his newspaper to reinforce the excitement of the Whig campaign and to attack President Van Buren. After the campaign Greeley changed the name of the paper to the *New York Tribune* and embarked on his own career as a nationally known publisher. Greeley's career as a presidential image-maker would eventually culminate in his own run for the presidency 32 years later.

Greeley's *New York Tribune* would later merge with the *New York Herald* to become the *New York Herald Tribune*. In 1966 the New York paper closed but their European edition continues to this day as the *International Herald Tribune*.