

TEACHER GUIDE

1840 DOC. #3: Whig Party Parade

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This drawing portrays a Whig campaign rally in Philadelphia in 1840. During the Harrison campaign people took to the streets in unprecedented numbers – thousands of people in parades sometimes ten miles long. For the entire campaign season from February through November the Whig party created giant celebrations in honor of their candidate. Many said it was like having a traditional Fourth of July Independence Day festival last for months. These rallies featured speeches, songs, hard cider, and images of log cabins.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION **What visual images to promote Harrison do you notice in this drawing?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Images include giant candidate portraits on the building (General Harrison on horse-back), American flags, a painting of a log cabin on the wagon, and campaign posters.

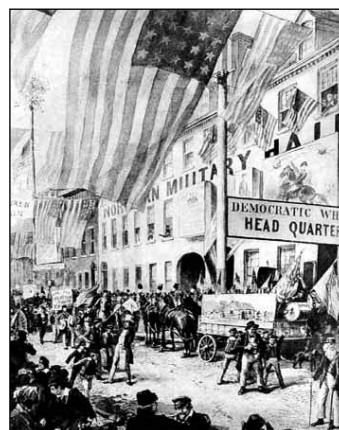
QUESTION **From this image, what are the aspects of a parade that were used to spark enthusiasm?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Drums, marching, and cheering would spark enthusiasm.

QUESTION **What particular advantages might such a rally have had over newspapers in mobilizing voters before the era of mass communication?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Large groups can increase enthusiasm. It's a way of placing an image in front of large numbers of people in a short time. It offers encouragement for the uninvolved voter to come out with everyone else for the big party.

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PowerPoint Slide

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What aspects of the “circus of 1840” are still with us today? How did the influential campaign of 1840 help to strengthen and/or weaken American democracy? Should campaigns focus both on issues and imagery?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Today we are accustomed to a barrage of campaign imagery including countless still and moving images of presidential candidates. In the early 19th century images of the candidates were limited. The Whig Party changed that in 1840, producing hundreds of portraits of Harrison, often on horseback in the style of George Washington. Harrison’s image appeared in drawings, paintings, on ribbons and mugs, on glass and metal, in newspapers, and on sheet music. Though the media were less sophisticated, the Whig Party established a sensational image-oriented campaign style that became the model for future elections.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

“Hero”**Reaching Voters** (parade)

This election began the tradition of the campaign as spectacle. Use video clips from the 2000 Republican and Democratic conventions (2000 doc. #2, 3) to compare the spectacle of 1840 with contemporary campaigns.