

TEACHER GUIDE

1840 DOC. #5: Democratic-Republican Party Newspaper

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today it is common to see newspaper ads for candidates appearing in the weeks and months leading up to an election. Again this process of selling candidates is not new. This newspaper advertisement for Martin Van Buren’s presidential campaign in 1840 is under the banner of the “Democratic Republican Party” which was the official name of the Democratic Party in that era. It includes references honoring past Presidents who ran as Democratic-Republicans including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Andrew Jackson, as well as George Washington, who had no party affiliation.

Vice presidential candidate Richard Johnson claimed to have killed the famous Shawnee Chief Tecumseh in the Battle of the Thames during the War of 1812. Whig skeptics questioned this assertion saying that there was no evidence that Tecumseh died at Johnson’s hands.

> **Project 1840 doc. #5a.**

QUESTION What first impressions are offered about the Democratic candidates? What is your evidence?

SUGGESTED ANSWER They are men of courage and stature, upholding American values of liberty and equality.

EVIDENCE American eagle with liberty and equality banners at top; well-dressed appearance in portrait; heroic military images in bottom illustrations

> **Have students read** the text related to presidential candidate Martin Van Buren on the handout.

QUESTION What messages are given about Van Buren’s qualifications to be reelected? What is your evidence?

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is from humble origins.

EVIDENCE text: “son of a farmer, a self-made man”

SUGGESTED ANSWER He revised the U.S. Constitution and fought for voting rights.

EVIDENCE text: “a member of the convention, to revise the constitution, and one of the leading advocates of the extension of the rights of suffrage”

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Text from two sections on student handout

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He is a successful and honest politician.**

EVIDENCE text: "In every station, honest and able"

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He challenged the wealthy ruling classes.**

EVIDENCE text: "has nobly devoted himself with unshak-
en firmness to the great work of rescuing the
People and Government of the United States
from the control and influence of the monied
aristocracy"

**> Have students read the text related to vice
presidential candidate Richard Johnson on the
student handout**

QUESTION **What messages are given about
Johnson's qualifications to be reelect-
ed? What is your evidence?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He is an experienced politician.**

EVIDENCE text: "member of the State Legislature From
1807 to 1837, a period of 30 years on the
house of Representatives and in the Senate"

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He is courageous in battle.**

EVIDENCE text: "commanded the regiment of Kentucky
mounted men and in their charge on the
enemy"; "he had slain with his own hand,
their Indian chief"

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He is a patriotic supporter of equal rights.**

EVIDENCE text: "A Democrat from boyhood, and a cham-
pion of equal rights"

QUESTION **Why does the author say that Johnson
"obtained for Harrison and Shelby an
easy victory"?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER **The author is challenging the Whig asser-
tion that their presidential candidate
William Henry Harrison was a military hero.**

> Project 1840 doc. #5b.

QUESTION **Why were these illustrations of vice-presidential candidate Johnson chosen over images of the presidential candidate?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Johnson was a military hero, Van Buren a life-long politician. There is far more dramatic impact in showing a scene of courage under fire and killing an "Indian chief" than in taking the oath of office or holding a pen.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

How can a voter determine whether the information about a candidate from an ad like this is true or not true?

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ADDITIONAL INFO

Many southerners distrusted Van Buren because he was from New York. But they were truly enraged by Richard Johnson of Kentucky. He lived openly with an African American woman and had two daughters with her whom he educated and presented to society. This affront to the racist attitudes of the white South, however, was not enough to keep Johnson from being included and elected on the Democratic ticket in 1836.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

"Hero"

Reaching Voters (campaign biography) Contemporary candidates also present brief campaign biographies to introduce or reinvent themselves to voters, although typically in film rather than text. Compare the bios in this 1840 newspaper advertisement with the bios of George W. Bush and Al Gore from their 2000 nominating conventions (2000 doc. #2).