

TEACHER GUIDE

1908 DOC. #1: “Taft-evelt” Poster and Photo of Taft & Roosevelt

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is common for presidential candidates to compare themselves to former Presidents in order to gain approval by association. Early presidential candidates often claimed George Washington as their political ancestor. In recent history several candidates have claimed association to John F. Kennedy. Bill Clinton ran a television commercial which showed him shaking hands with Kennedy as a young man, hoping to gain credibility by the brief connection (1992 doc. #1). Dan Quayle made the association in a debate with his opponent, Lloyd Bentsen, in the 1988 vice-presidential debates, saying that he had as much congressional experience as Kennedy did when he ran for President in 1960. Bentsen countered, “I knew Jack Kennedy. Senator, you’re no Jack Kennedy.”

In 1908 Teddy Roosevelt followed George Washington’s example of limiting the presidency to two elected terms by choosing not to run for a third term. Roosevelt selected Ohio Superior Court judge William Howard Taft to be his successor because he felt that Taft would continue his policies. Some were suspicious that Taft might be a puppet for Roosevelt, suggesting that T.A.F.T. stood for “Take Advice From Teddy.”

> **Project the document.**

QUESTION Whose picture is shown in this poster, and what is the message?

SUGGESTED ANSWER Portraits of Taft and Roosevelt are blended giving the impression they are indistinguishable and that Taft will follow Roosevelt’s policies.

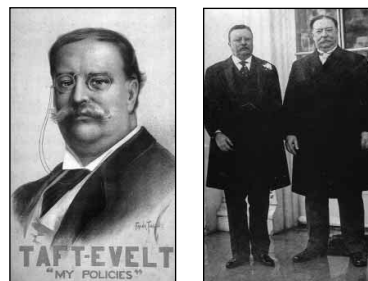
EVIDENCE blended (pre-digital) images of Taft and Roosevelt (Taft’s head and body shape with Roosevelt’s eyes and glasses); text: “Taft-evelt” and “My Policies”

QUESTION Is this a pro or anti-Taft poster?

SUGGESTED ANSWER This poster could be taken as either an endorsement of Taft following Roosevelt’s footsteps or a critique that Taft was not his own man.

SEE NOTE →

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PowerPoint Slide

NOTE

In fact this was intended as a pro-Taft/Roosevelt poster.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

How have other candidates before and after Taft linked their image to that of popular Presidents? How have candidates distanced themselves from unpopular Presidents?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The decision to link Roosevelt and Taft in the campaign was a strategic one. Roosevelt knew, however, that it could be overdone. He advised Taft to limit the references to himself in his acceptance speech, saying "My name should be used only enough thoroughly to convince people of the identity and continuity of our policies" (Troy 120).

The relationship between Taft and Roosevelt soured once Taft began making his own presidential decisions, many of which disappointed Roosevelt. In the next election, 1912, Roosevelt challenged Taft for the Republican nomination and, when the Old Guard opted for Taft, ended up running for President on the Bull Moose or Progressive ticket.