

TEACHER GUIDE

1908 DOC. #3: Taft Haying Photograph

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today it may seem like a given that a campaign will use polls, charts, and photo opportunities to push their candidate, but it was not always so. The business of advertising may seem ancient, but it had its roots in the first public relations firm, Parker and Lee, which opened its doors in 1905. They led the way in creating dramatic images to sell their products. And their new science was soon applied to the selling of presidential candidates.

“Photo op” is short for “photographic opportunity.” Politicians and their managers try to position the candidate in the press in ways that show them in the best light, appeal to a particular target audience, or highlight particular political positions. Photo ops are as old as photography but the introduction of new image-reproduction technologies in the early 1900s brought photos to the front pages of national newspapers on a regular basis. A well-constructed photo could do more to sway readers than the accompanying news article and it was often easier for campaigns to orchestrate reporters’ images than their words. If “a picture is worth a thousand words,” then a well-designed photo op could be worth quite a few votes.

> **Project the document.**

QUESTION	What messages are the Taft campaign attempting to convey with this photograph? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Taft is a friend to the farmer and he is “just one of the people.”
EVIDENCE	Taft is posed next to a farmer who is actively working hauling hay in a farm field; image suggests Taft is also haying
QUESTION	Is this a candid photo or a staged photo? Why do you think so?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	It seems staged.
EVIDENCE	it is unlikely that Taft is involved in the haying operation wearing a top hat and white shirt

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Taft Haying Photograph

PowerPoint Slide

FURTHER QUESTIONS

How do today's candidates market themselves to appear as "one of the people"?

Can you think of examples of staged photo ops being used by modern political candidates? Are these a good way to help the public get to know the candidates? Why or why not?

Should advertising and public relations firms be used to market candidates? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL INFO

This photograph of Taft was taken in August, 1908 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, during the summer hay harvest. His campaign team used the new business of public relations to show their man as "The Candidate of the People and for the People."

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

"Commoner"

Media Bias

Target Audience (farmers)

Analyze modern spin and counter-spin in 21st century photo ops using 2004 doc. #5.