

TEACHER GUIDE

1952 DOC. #5: Stevenson Photo and Buttons from '56

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although television would soon become the medium of choice for campaigns, in 1952 people still got most of their information about candidates from the newspaper. News photos had become a quick and easy way for the public to get to know the candidates. This document demonstrates one way in which a single photograph could have a far-reaching impact on how a candidate was perceived by the public.

Stevenson was seen by some as a distant upper-class intellectual. New York Herald Tribune columnists Joseph and Stewart Alsop called Stevenson and his aides “eggheads” and the image stuck. Stevenson, who was also known for his quick wit, responded, “Eggheads of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your yolks” (Boller 287).

This photograph shows Stevenson at a campaign stop in Flint, Michigan on Labor Day, 1952. It was taken quickly at arms length by Flint Journal staff photographer Bill Gallagher. The shot won the Pulitzer Prize for news photography for Gallagher. The picture became an enduring image for Stevenson. Both Stevenson and Eisenhower used this famous image on their 1956 campaign buttons.

> **Project** the document.

PHOTO OF STEVENSON

QUESTION What messages might this photo give about the candidate?

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is hard working. He is unconcerned with his appearance.

EVIDENCE Stevenson is working on a speech in the picture; hole in the shoe suggests he has walked long and worked hard on the campaign trail; also might suggest he doesn't care whether his clothes are in good repair

> **Explain** that the campaign buttons are from the following campaign of 1956, which was a rematch between Eisenhower and Stevenson.

1952 DOC. #5



Stevenson Photo and Buttons from '56

PowerPoint Slide

TOP BUTTON: "DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU"

QUESTION **What message about their candidate might Eisenhower's managers want to portray in using this image?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Stevenson's victory would lead to hard times. Better stay with Eisenhower.

EVIDENCE hole in shoe represents poverty when combined with the words, "Don't let this happen to you!"; "Vote for Ike!"

BOTTOM BUTTON: "FOR '56"

QUESTION **Which candidate does this button support?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER It supports Stevenson.

EVIDENCE knees crossed and hole in shoe refer to Stevenson from now-famous photograph of the 1952 campaign

QUESTION **What message about their candidate might Stevenson's managers want to portray in using this image?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is a humble and hard-working man of the people (not a distant intellectual).

EVIDENCE has worn his shoes down to nothing while visiting voters on the campaign trail; doesn't care too much about his appearance

QUESTION **What differences do you notice in the artists' drawings and design that offer different messages in each button?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Stevenson button is unifying and human, suggesting a friendly connection with the candidate.

EVIDENCE Stevenson cartoon is like a comic strip, made to make you smile with no socks and a twinkle around the hole; border is a circle suggesting unity

SUGGESTED ANSWER Eisenhower button is divided and frightening, suggesting a clear choice against bad times.

EVIDENCE Eisenhower drawing is stark and removed with no body showing; background has a dividing line separating them and us

ADDITIONAL INFO

Most of Eisenhower's campaign buttons were purely restatements of the central theme of "I Like Ike!" Both campaigns generated nearly one thousand different buttons as well as jewelry, bandanas, matchbooks, and ribbons. Stevenson's campaign issued his famous "holey shoe" image as door hangers, lapel pins and tie clasps. Stevenson himself claimed to disapprove of using "soft soap, slogans, gimmicks, bandwagons and all the other infernal machines of modern high pressure politics." He saw all these as "contempt for the people's intelligence, common sense and dignity" (Hake, *Encyclopedia*193).

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using simple images like a news photo or a button to convey information about a presidential candidate?

Stevenson was labeled "the egghead" and Eisenhower as "the general." How can being labeled like this help or hurt a candidate? Can you think of other examples of labeling in presidential campaigns?

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

**Attack
"Commoner"**