

TEACHER GUIDE

1968 DOC. #5: Humphrey “Man on the Street” TV Commercial

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When Humphrey began his campaign, there was a general perception among the public that he couldn't win. The *Chicago Daily News* headline the day after his nomination was “HUMPHREY IN A SHAMBLES” (Diamond 161). The Humphrey campaign was constantly short on cash, whereas the Nixon campaign had lots of money, particularly to pay for television time.

Humphrey was nevertheless able to raise enough money to air a series of “Man on the Street” commercials to show that he was a man of the people. In this commercial you will see people interviewed as to why they think Humphrey would make a good President.

> **Play** the video clip.

Commercial Script:

A POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| VO | These are critical times. Who do you want to be the next President? |
| (Woman #1) | Hubert Humphrey offers the best choice for the American people today. |
| (Man # 1) | If Humphrey can do two things, if he can, end the Vietnam War and if he can shuttle our urban problems, I'll be a very happy man. |
| (Man # 2) | I think he very definitely has his own personal ideas; this is a very strong man. |
| (Man # 3) | I would trust his judgment on any issues that might come up. |
| (Woman # 2) | Mr. Humphrey, in our opinion, is a man we can trust, and one who will unify the country. |
| (Man # 4) | He has the initiative and the ingenuity and the administrative authority to run the country in these critical times. |
| (Man # 5) | The important thing is to get a man that the people in this country will follow. |
| (Woman # 3) | I believe in Mr. Humphrey and I can trust him. |
| (Woman # 4) | Because he has the power to bring us together again. |
| VO | People believe in Humphrey. The country needs him. |

HUMPHREY
 A PAID POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT
 CITIZENS FOR HUMPHREY/MUSKIE
 1025 CONN. AVE., N.W. WASH., D.C.

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Humphrey “Man on the Street” TV Commercial

Video Clip

Length: 1 minute

QUESTION **What is the main message of this commercial? Give evidence to support your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER In critical times Humphrey can be trusted to bring the country together.

EVIDENCE voiceover: "These are critical times. Who do you want to be President?;" several speakers reflect on Humphrey's trustworthiness and ability to unify; quote: "People believe in Humphrey. The country needs him."

QUESTION **Who is the target audience for this commercial? Why do you think so?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Middle-class white men, women and young people are the audience.

EVIDENCE all speakers are white; all appear to be middle class; several appear to be in their twenties

QUESTION **What techniques are used to make the commercial seem "real" and unstaged?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The traffic sounds and traffic passing in the background give the impression that these people are being randomly interviewed on the streets.

SEE NOTE →

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What advantages and disadvantages might a "man on the street" approach like this have compared to a series of policy "experts" speaking on Humphrey's behalf?

Are "man on the streets" commercials honest reflections of public opinion about a candidate? Why or why not?

Why is the commercial titled "Man on the Street" if women appear in it?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Joseph Napolitan was the media specialist who helped Humphrey nearly accomplish a come-from-behind win in the 1968 election. He designed many of the effective Humphrey TV spots that appeared late in the race. These positive commercials were efforts to highlight Humphrey as trustworthy and kind as they explained his accomplishments with civil rights and Social Security. There were also negative commercials that tried to raise voter suspicion about Nixon, asking about his "secret plan" to end the war and criticizing his opposition to signing a nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

NOTE

In fact, political TV commercials often use paid actors and staged scenes of cheering crowds to convey support for a candidate. During the actor's strikes in 1988 and 2000, one of the groups hardest hit was the political campaigns for those fall elections. Using actors to appear as real supporters of a candidate is legal, since political advertising is exempt from "Truth in Advertising" laws.