

TEACHER GUIDE

1968 DOC. #7: Wallace “Law and Order: Busing” TV Commercial

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The U.S. political system is sometimes called the two-party system since there have always been two major parties vying for power in winner-take-all elections. There have often been third-party candidates as well and sometimes these candidates have had the effect of shifting the balance of power among the major parties. Ross Perot’s Independent candidacy in 1992 and Ralph Nader’s Green Party candidacy in 2000 were both credited with changing the debates and perhaps the outcome in those elections.

One of the most significant third-party candidates ever was George Wallace, who ran for President on the conservative American Independent Party ticket in 1968. Wallace had won national notoriety in 1963 while Governor of Alabama for his “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door.” He made a public show of attempting to block African American students Vivian Malone and James Hood from gaining lawful entrance to the University of Alabama. Wallace eventually stepped aside and the students enrolled, but in the process, George Wallace became a hero to segregationists everywhere.

Wallace’s independent candidacy in 1968 found him competing with Nixon in the South on the issue of “law and order” and with Humphrey in the North by appealing to blue-collar workers who were upset with student protests. His campaign slogan was “Stand Up for America.” He opposed court-ordered busing of students designed to integrate schools. He wanted to end the Vietnam War by military means, and his running mate, General Curtis LeMay, suggested that the United States should use nuclear weapons to achieve that end. Wallace received over 13% of the popular votes cast in 1968, nearly 10 million votes.

Wallace did not have access to the kind of money that either Nixon or Humphrey did. As a result, his commercials were very simple, with Wallace speaking from a podium so voters could become familiar with his face and voice. You will now see a Wallace commercial entitled, “Law and Order: Busing.”

> **Play** the video clip.

Commercial Script:

A POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT

- VO | Why are more and more Americans turning to governor Wallace? Follow, as your children are bussed across town.
- (Wallace) | As President, I shall, within the law, turn back the absolute control of the public school systems to the people of the respective states.
- VO | Why are more and more millions of Americans turning to governor Wallace? Open a little business and see what might happen.
- (Wallace) | As President, I will stand up for your local police and firemen, in protecting your safety and property.
- VO | Why are more and more millions of Americans turning to governor Wallace? Watch your hard earned tax dollars sail away to anti American countries.

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Wallace “Law and Order: Busing” TV Commercial

Video Clip
Length: 1 minute

(Wallace) As President, I will halt the giveaway of your American dollars and products to those nations that aid our enemies.

VO Wallace has the courage to stand up for America. Give him your support.

GOVERNOR WALLACE FOR PRESIDENT
 THE PRECEDING WAS A POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT PAID FOR BY THE WALLACE CAMPAIGN.

QUESTION **What positions does Wallace present in his speech? Give evidence to explain your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He supports states' rights and opposes forced busing, crime, and international aid programs.

EVIDENCE Wallace quote: "I shall return control of schools to people in the states," "I will make it possible to walk the streets in safety," "I will halt the giveaway to nations that support our enemies"

QUESTION **What visual symbols does Wallace use to represent these positions?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The school bus driving away represents federally-mandated forced busing, the streetlight shot out represents crime, and the cargo ship fading into the distance represents foreign aid.

QUESTION **Is this a message-based commercial or an image-oriented commercial? Give evidence to support your conclusion.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER This is a message-oriented commercial.

EVIDENCE Although the commercial uses provocative images, Wallace is primarily communicating his position on issues – states rights, busing, crime and foreign aid.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Is this a racist commercial? Why or why not?

Although neither Nixon nor Humphrey is mentioned in this commercial, is this an attack on Wallace's opponents? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Fear of crime was a major issue at this time. Polls showed that half of the women and a fifth of the men in the country were afraid to walk alone in their neighborhoods at night (Congressional Quarterly 147). Wallace complained about Nixon stealing his theme, "I was the first one to speak out on law and order. Now they usin' our phrase" (Boller 324).

The Wallace commercials were created by a Birmingham advertising agency, Luckie and Forney, and were deliberately made to appear homemade in order to underline Wallace's anti-establishment image (Diamond 181). Wallace's attacks on "pointy-headed bureaucrats" (Adatto 171) found a connection with the same voters who had supported Goldwater in 1964 and who would later sweep Ronald Reagan to power in 1980 (Kamber 108).

Wallace's third-party run was the strongest since Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose campaign in 1912, and Robert LaFollette's Progressive Party campaign in 1924. He was on the ballot in all 50 states and polls showed him to have as much as 20% support at times during the campaign. In 1968 there was some concern that his candidacy could cause this close race to end without either Nixon or Humphrey achieving an electoral college majority, requiring a decision by the U.S. House of Representatives. This would have left Wallace in a powerful position to demand concessions in exchange for his support.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

- Fear**
- Race**
- Target Audience**