

TEACHER GUIDE

1984 DOC. #1: *Time* Covers, Reagan “Man of the Year”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The “common man” and the “hero” are two candidate personas that have been with us since the very earliest elections. Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Abraham Lincoln all succeeded in combining these images, but few have been able to blend them as effectively as Ronald Reagan. It is the job of campaign managers to craft images such as these and to get them to the voters using mass media. A great example of media image-making can be seen in the following portraits of Ronald Reagan from the two occasions he was selected as *Time* magazine’s “Man of the Year.”

One portrait is from the beginning of his first term in January 1981, and the second is from three years later, as he prepared for his reelection campaign. In one of the portraits he is shown back-to-back with Yuri Andropov, leader of the Soviet Union. Neither of these images was created by Reagan’s campaign, but *Time* magazine’s visual constructions of Reagan helped to establish his political and historical image.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION What messages does the portrait on the left convey? Give evidence to support your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWER Reagan is a regular guy, like an old cowboy, confident and reflective.

EVIDENCE he’s wearing casual clothes, his shirt is unbuttoned, his hands are in his back pockets; his Western-style shirt and belt buckle suggest a cowboy; he’s not surrounded by any signs of power or prestige; his gaze makes it appear as though he’s deep in thought; his jaw is set and his shoulders are back making him appear self-assured

QUESTION What messages does the portrait on the right convey? Give evidence to support your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWER Reagan is a patriot, and a strong and determined leader.

EVIDENCE his clothes are red, white and blue; his straight-ahead stare and stern face make him seem forceful; his position facing the artist and Andropov’s turned head make Reagan seem in command of the relationship

1984 DOC. #1



Time Covers, Reagan “Man of the Year”

PowerPoint Slide

QUESTION Which portrait do you think was made in 1981 at the beginning of his first term? Which one was made in 1984, at the end of his first four years in office?

SUGGESTED ANSWER The portrait on the left is from 1981 and the right from 1984.

EVIDENCE the portrait on the right shows Reagan facing off with his counterpart in the Soviet Union, and this would not have been the case with a new President who would have no previous history as Commander in Chief; the 1981 image underscores the “outsider cowboy” image that helped attract voters to Reagan in the first place

QUESTION Do these covers suggest that *Time’s* coverage is pro-Reagan, anti-Reagan, or neutral?

SUGGESTED ANSWER These covers suggest that *Time* is pro-Reagan.

EVIDENCE although it is not possible to evaluate the overall coverage of Reagan from just these two covers of the magazines, the designation of “Man of the Year” is a notable award bestowed on few leaders; the portraits of Reagan are positive

SEE NOTE

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Is it appropriate for a newsmagazine to take an editorial position supporting political candidates?

Why might *Time* have chosen to use painted portraits rather than photos for these covers?

NOTE

The 1981 portrait was painted by Aaron Shikler; the 1984 portrait by Alfred Leslie.

NOTE

In its first issue each year, *Time* magazine names a “Man of the Year.” Reagan is one of only five Presidents who have been named as “Man of the Year” twice. The others are Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR is the only one to be named three times.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Reagan’s advisors carefully crafted his “cowboy” image with repeated photo ops of the candidate at his California ranch, cutting wood, and looking westward. They also took pains to show him in the role of the tough warrior who could stand up to the dangerous Soviets.

During his first term (1981-1984), Reagan moved away from détente (peaceful coexistence and diplomacy) with the Soviet Union, and in one offhand comment he referred to it as the “evil empire” (a reference to the popular *Star Wars* films). He put arms control talks on hold, spent more money on the military, and backed anti-Soviet movements throughout the world. His campaign slogan, “America Is Back, Standing Proud,” reflected Reagan’s commitment to maintaining the U.S. role as global superpower. In 1982 one million people rallied in New York to support a nuclear freeze to keep the U.S. and Soviets from expanding the arms race, prompting Reagan to take tentative steps toward reviving arms control negotiations.

Journalist W.A. Henry described the power of Reagan’s image in this way: “In his most effective moments, Reagan appeared to have attained the goal of every national politician, to embody so thoroughly the myths and traits of the country’s idealized image of itself that a vote for Ronald Reagan would be a vote for the real America” (Melder 193).

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

“Hero”
Media Bias