

TEACHER GUIDE

1984 DOC. #3: Mondale "Trade Deficit" TV Commercial

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

So often in modern U.S. presidential campaigns one candidate simply is more at ease than the other in front of the television cameras. Kennedy looked more self-assured than Richard Nixon in their 1960 debates. Gerald Ford was mocked by Chevy Chase on *Saturday Night Live* for his habit of tripping when on camera. Bill Clinton clearly enjoyed working a crowd in a way that George H. W. Bush didn't.

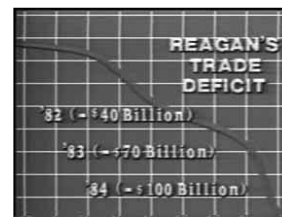
Walter Mondale, Reagan's challenger in 1984, could not match Reagan's personal charisma and ease on television, hardly surprising since Reagan had entered politics after a successful career in films and television. Mondale even admitted, "I'm not comfortable in front of television and I'm afraid I never will be" (Troy 249). Few of Mondale's commercials even contained images of the candidate.

In part due to the candidate's lack of personal appeal, the Mondale campaign chose to air mostly negative commercials. They attacked Reagan for his failure to pursue arms control, the increasing federal deficit, and the growing gap between the wealthy and the middle class. These commercials backfired as many voters failed to accept Mondale's message that the charismatic Reagan was reckless and insensitive.

> Play the video clip.

QUESTION	What messages are communicated about the trade deficit?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The main messages are that the deficit is huge, exports are falling, we are losing jobs, and Mondale will stop this.
QUESTION	How does Mondale come across in this commercial? Why do you say that?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	(opinions will vary) Mondale doesn't seem particularly charismatic.
EVIDENCE	his body language is stiff, the background dull, his facial expressions are muted, his overall presentation is less than dynamic
QUESTION	Which seems more central to the commercial: the narration, the music, or the imagery? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	This commercial is centered on the narration.
EVIDENCE	no music, only a ticking sound; imagery is limited to a photo of Reagan's smiling face, a graph of the trade deficit going down, a shot of Mondale speaking in an office, and the text: "Mondale for President"

1984 DOC. #3



Mondale "Trade Deficit" Commercial

Video Clip

Length: 30 seconds

Commercial Script:

VO The Reagan trade deficit is the largest in our nation's history. Farm exports fell for the first time in thirteen years. Two million jobs are being lost.

Mondale "In my administration we will export American products, not American jobs. No dumping here, no unfair barriers over there. In my plan we will make them play by the rules, then we'll beat the competition."

VO Mondale for President. This President will know what he's doing.

QUESTION

What are the major differences between the styles of these two commercials (doc.#2 and doc. #3)?

SUGGESTED ANSWER

Reagan’s commercial is upbeat, image oriented, and emotional while Mondale’s focuses on a negative issue, it is policy oriented, and it stresses facts and plans over imagery and emotion.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What did Reagan’s Deputy Chief of Staff, Michael Deaver, mean when he said, “I really do believe that people absorb impressions rather than substance, particularly in this day and age” (*American Photography*).

Should slick campaign imagery and a candidate’s personal charisma be decisive factors in choosing Presidents?

Should voters be concerned about a trade deficit? Why or why not?

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Attack
Class/Labor
Economic Issues