

TEACHER GUIDE

1992 DOC. #1: Clinton "Journey" TV Commercial

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the classic 1939 film, *Mr. Smith Goes the Washington*, Jimmy Stewart plays a young idealistic man who is elected to the Senate as a Washington outsider, untainted by all the corruption associated with capitol politics. This film was a dramatization of a common theme in U.S. politics. From Andrew Jackson in 1828, to Ronald Reagan in 1980, the role of the heroic outsider who comes in from "out West" to tame Washington has carried many candidates successfully into the White House. Bill Clinton used his "outside the beltway status" to follow that familiar path to the presidency.

Seven months before the election, Bill Clinton's campaign team gathered a focus group of potential voters to determine how the public viewed Clinton. Their findings were that potential voters didn't know or trust Clinton. They thought that he was a typical politician, born to wealth and privilege (Morreale 164). To correct this, his advisors decided to put Clinton in situations that were not typical of candidates up to that point. He played saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, answered questions about whether he wore "boxers or briefs" on MTV, and ate at McDonalds with the cameras rolling. Soon his image had changed. Over time Clinton was seen as a "New Democrat," different from the Republican President George Bush but also different from "Old Democrats" like Michael Dukakis and Walter Mondale.

Bill Clinton wanted to emphasize his youth. He was part of the first generation born after World War II, a time of Vietnam War protest and the Peace Corps. He was careful not to be seen as too far out of the mainstream, since that perception had destroyed the candidacy of George McGovern twenty years before. At the same time, he wanted to show that he was young and ready to replace the tired, old ideas of the Reagan/Bush era. The video clip you will see is from a 90-second commercial taken from a longer campaign film entitled *The Man From Hope* that had been shown at the Democratic convention to introduce the nominee.

Commercial Script:

CLINTON:

I was born in a little town called Hope, Arkansas, three months after my father died. I remember that old, two-story house where I lived with my grandparents. They had very limited income. It was in 1963 that I went to Washington and met President Kennedy at the Boys' Nation program. And I remember just thinking what an incredible country this was, that somebody like me, you know had no money or anything, would be given the opportunity to meet the President. That's when I decided that I could really do public service 'cause I cared so much about people. I worked my way through law school with part-time jobs, anything I could find. And after I graduated I didn't really care about making a lot of money, I just wanted to go home and see if I could make a difference. We've worked hard on education and health care, to create jobs and we've made real progress. Now it's exhilarating to me to think that as President I could help to change all our people's lives for the better and bring hope back to the American dream.

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Clinton "Journey" TV Commercial

Video Clip

Length: 1 minute, 30 seconds

> Play the video clip.

QUESTION **What are the messages of this commercial? Give evidence to support your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Clinton came from a humble family background and he worked hard to be of service to others.

EVIDENCE "I lived with my grandparents... on a very limited income," "I worked my way through law school," and "I could really do public service"

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is a warm and friendly man and his election will bring hope.

EVIDENCE images of Clinton smiling and his friendly voice begins with the words, "I was born in Hope" and ends with, "bring hope back"

QUESTION **What types of images have been selected and what messages are they meant to convey?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The images chosen include black and white scrapbook-type photos to make Clinton seem like a regular guy and just one of the family. Images of him meeting with President Kennedy convey that the torch is being passed to the next generation through Clinton. Color photos of Clinton as Governor appearing with children, elders, and workers make him seem caring and friendly.

QUESTION **What do you notice about the audio, both Clinton's narration and the background music? What message is the audio track meant to convey?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Clinton's talking is quiet and conversational, meant to convey that he is a warm and likeable man. The music is quiet, light, and upbeat, which underlines the hopeful and familiar message of Clinton's words.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What advantages might a biographical commercial like this have over an attack commercial?

Can you think of current examples of candidates using images of hope, family, and community service to encourage voter support?

What groups might this commercial be particularly effective in targeting?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The producers of "Journey," Linda Bloodworth-Thomason and her husband Harry Thomason, had previously co-produced the popular sitcoms *Designing Women* and *Evening Shade*.

The Clinton team wanted to encourage an association between their candidate and the heroes of the 1960s. The film included images and reflections on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy as well as John F. Kennedy. The JFK footage inspired particular comment from the press. After the election, *Time* magazine reported on the importance of the "Man From Hope" theme: "Indeed, the most memorable moment in the convention video about the man from Hope was the scene of the eager student being inspired by Kennedy's anointing touch." *Newsweek* declared, "the footage rises from mere advertising to the realm of prophetic history. For it documents JFK reaching across the years to a boy he did not know — and to whom the torch of leadership now passes in an emphatic statement of America's desire for change."

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

"Commoner"

"Family Man"

Target Audience (Rural Poor)