

TEACHER GUIDE

1992 DOC. #3: Bush & Clinton “Arkansas” TV Commercials

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Negative campaigning has been a part of U.S. presidential politics since the first contested election, but the abundance of negative commercials in the 1988 presidential election drew newfound scrutiny. One of the strategies the news media used to examine the issue of negative campaigning was through “ad watches.” These are reports on the truthfulness of statements made by candidates in their commercials. In the 1992 campaign, these ad watches became a regular part of newspaper and network news coverage. Not everyone agrees on the effectiveness of ad watches. Supporters say that the ad watches help keep campaigns in check by exposing lies. Critics say that they can’t keep candidates from gaining votes from deceptive commercials, since many more people see the commercials than the ad watches.

The Clinton campaign learned a great deal from studying how Bush had effectively attacked Dukakis in 1988. They saw that Dukakis was hurt by failing to respond quickly and forcefully to Bush’s charges. This gave many voters the impression that the Bush commercials (like the Willie Horton or Revolving Door commercials) were true. As a result Clinton’s team decided to respond immediately to negative commercials from Bush. Pairs of attack and response commercials occurred frequently toward the end of the 1992 campaign when Bush was behind in the polls. Some felt that the speed at which these commercials appeared made it hard for voters to distinguish between what was true and what was false.

You will now watch two commercials about Clinton’s record as Governor of Arkansas, the first from the Bush campaign and the second from the Clinton campaign. Again, notice the images and audio track. Ask yourself how a voter might find out the truth in a case where two commercials come to contradictory conclusions.

Commercial Script:

VOICE OVER:

In his 12 years as Governor, Bill Clinton has doubled his state’s debt, doubled government spending, and signed the largest tax increase in his state’s history. Yet his state remains the 45th worst in which to work, the 45th worst for children. It has the worst environmental policy. And the FBI says Arkansas has America’s biggest increase in the rate of serious crime.

And now Bill Clinton says he wants to do for America what he’s done for Arkansas. America can’t take that risk.

> **Play** the video clip, 1992 doc. #3a.

1992 DOC. #3a



Bush “Arkansas 2” TV Commercial

Video Clip

Length: 30 seconds

Script on Student Handout

QUESTION **What claims are made about Clinton’s record in Arkansas? Give evidence from the commercial to back up your statements.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Things are worse off in Arkansas under Clinton. Taxes, spending, debt and crime are all growing. Jobs, children, and the environment have been neglected.

EVIDENCE quotes: “doubled his state’s debt, doubled government spending, signed the largest tax increase in his state’s history,” the state ranks “45th worst in which to work, the 45th worst for children. It has the worst environmental policy,” “biggest increase in the rate of serious crime”

QUESTION **What images and sounds are used in this commercial and for what purposes?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER An approaching thunderstorm and a vulture in a tree suggest dangerous and hard times.

Commercial Script:

VOICE OVER:

For 12 years he’s battled the odds in one of America’s poorest states and made steady progress. Arkansas is now first in the nation in job growth. Even Bush’s own Secretary of Labor just called job growth in Arkansas enormous. He moved 17,000 people from welfare to work. And he’s kept taxes low: Arkansas has the second lowest tax burden in the country. No wonder his fellow Governors, Democrats and Republicans, have named him the nation’s most effective Governor.

Bill Clinton:
For people for a change.

> **Play** the video clip, 1992 doc. #3b.

1992 DOC. #3b



Clinton “Steady” TV Commercial

Video Clip

Length: 30 seconds
Script on Student Handout

QUESTION **What claims are made about Clinton’s record in Arkansas? Give evidence from the commercial to back up your statements.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Things in Arkansas are better under his leadership.

EVIDENCE quotes: “first in the nation in job growth,” “17,000 people from welfare to work,” “kept taxes low,” “second lowest tax burden in the country,” “Governors, Democrats and Republicans, have named him the nation’s most effective Governor,” he received praise from the Secretary of Labor

QUESTION **What images are used and for what purposes?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The commercial shows Clinton multitasking at his desk to portray him as an active leader.

QUESTION **What sounds are used and for what purposes?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The commercial has upbeat and authoritative music, rising in tone to suggest strong leadership and mounting hope.

> **Distribute** the handout “Clinton’s Arkansas Record” that includes the two commercials’ scripts. **Have students** work individually or in pairs.

> Discuss their answers using the separate **Teacher Answer Guide** provided with the student handout.