

TEACHER GUIDE

1992 DOC. #4: *Time* Cover, Clinton

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Can you trust him?” This question has been central in the mass marketing of U.S. presidential campaigns since Watergate. In 1974 the televised impeachment hearings were a daily reminder that President Nixon had deceived the people. In most subsequent elections, issues of character, trust, and honesty have been raised. In 2000, Republican candidate George W. Bush repeatedly attacked Democrat Al Gore for exaggerating the truth about key roles he had played in previous administration, noting that Gore once seemed to imply that he had invented the Internet. The issue of trust was a major factor in Gore’s loss. In 2004, Democratic candidate John Kerry attacked incumbent President George W. Bush for having lied about reasons for going to war with Iraq.

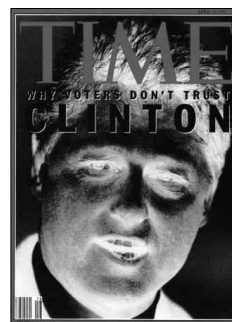
The “trust” issue became a major problem early in the Clinton campaign of 1992 when the weekly tabloid *The Star* ran a headline “MY 12-YEAR AFFAIR WITH BILL CLINTON,” describing allegations by a woman named Gennifer Flowers. Bill and Hillary Clinton responded to the charges with an appearance on the *Sixty Minutes* evening news program in which Clinton admitted to causing “pain” in his marriage, but denied having the affair. Flowers then held a press conference in which she played tapes of intimate conversations with Clinton, but she lost credibility when it was revealed that she had been encouraged by Republican aides and was paid by *The Star* for her story. The trust question shifted from “Can you trust him?” to “Who do you trust less, the candidate or the media?”

The Bush campaign tried to make an issue of Clinton’s character by running commercials questioning his honesty. One of the Bush commercials used the following document, a cover of *Time* magazine from the week of April 20, 1992, to discredit him. In this case the images of Clinton as not-to-be-trusted did not translate into votes for Bush. Clinton got the nickname “the comeback kid” for surviving these charges and going on to win primaries, the nomination, and eventually the presidency.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION	What messages are communicated here about candidate Bill Clinton? Give evidence from the cover.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Clinton can’t be trusted and this may cost him the election.
EVIDENCE	the text: “Why Voters Don’t Trust Clinton,” Clinton’s image as a photographic negative – implying that the candidate is not as he seems or that something is reversed or hidden
QUESTION	Who created this negative construction of Clinton?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The editors and artists at <i>Time</i> magazine.

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***Time* cover, Clinton**

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QUESTION **Why would *Time* construct this critical image of Clinton?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER *Time* may have been trying to raise important questions about the candidate, to follow up on issues already raised in the campaign, to hurt Clinton's chances, or to use drama and controversy to sell more magazines.

SEE NOTE →

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Should a candidate's personal life be an issue in a campaign? Why or why not?

All voters did not distrust Clinton, at least in 1992. Why didn't the *Time* headline read "Why some voters don't trust Clinton?"

How has the question of character been raised in recent campaigns?

NOTE

Although reputable news magazines have a clear policy against altering news photos within their magazines, they regularly manipulate photographs on their covers. The magazines consider cover images to be advertisements for the magazine, not news.

ADDITIONAL INFO

The text for the cover story on *Time's* magazine was "Qualms about his character could doom him in November." They didn't, but issues of character and trust dogged Clinton throughout his presidency. He was later impeached for having sexual relations with White House intern Monica Lewinsky and lying about it afterwards.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

**Attack
Media Bias**