

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 2004 DOC. #5: Photo Ops and Counter Ops

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2004 the marketing of presidential candidates appeared to have reached a new level with micro-marketing strategies designed to reach every computer and cable viewer in the country and rapid-fire digital responses crafted to counter any claim. But the process of marketing candidates was nothing new. One hundred years previously the *New York Times* had suggested that “campaigning is only a political name for advertising” (Smith 72).

In 1896 Mark Hanna, William McKinley’s campaign manager, created the first modern campaign with telephones, accountants, and pollsters oiling a successful mass-marketing effort. Hanna was the first campaign manager to make “photo ops” a regular part of the campaign, inviting photographers to come to McKinley’s home where supporters would visit during his “front porch campaign” (see 1896, Doc. #2). George W. Bush’s chief campaign strategist, Karl Rove, modeled himself on Hanna, whose systematic organization and appeals to big business earned McKinley the White House.

By 2004 images of candidates Bush and Kerry were available 24/7 with new shots seemingly available every time you clicked the remote or the mouse. While photos in 1904 were typically used to spin a positive image of the candidate (see 1904, Doc. #3), a century later photos were also often used to spin the art of negative campaigning. Context meant everything as captions, titles and banners could transform a positive message into a negative one at an artist’s or editor’s command. Photo spins were also used to appeal to a particular target audience, either to support one’s own candidate or to diminish one’s opponent.

In this lesson you will see several pairs of photos of Bush and Kerry. For each image notice what messages the photo itself suggests about the candidate and how the message may change in the context of caption, title or added words. Also notice who the target audience might be for each photo.

> **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5a.

> **Explain** that this image was published in *USA Today* in November of 2003.

**QUESTION** | **What messages about Kerry does the image convey? Give evidence to support your view.**

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** | Answers will vary. Possibilities include that he is funny, a risk taker, or a man of mystery.

**EVIDENCE** | funny and risk taker—he is riding up a ramp on a motorcycle onto a TV set; man of mystery—his face is hidden behind his black helmet, the New York City nightscape suggests mystery

**2004 DOC. #5a**



**Kerry rides motorcycle onto Leno’s *Tonight Show* stage**

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**QUESTION** Does the caption shift the meaning behind the photo itself? Give evidence to support your conclusion.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** No, it is descriptive rather than editorial.

**EVIDENCE** “Kerry rides motorcycle onto Leno’s *Tonight Show* stage” simply explains where he is doing this act rather than changing the impression of the act itself

**QUESTION** Who might be the target audience for this photo op? Give evidence as to why.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Younger voters, TV viewers who enjoy humor.

**EVIDENCE** Kerry chose *The Tonight Show* for his appearance, a program more likely to be seen by younger viewers

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5b.
- > **Explain** that this image and caption was published on the *St. Petersburg Times* website in June of 2004.

**QUESTION** What messages about Kerry are communicated by this image and caption? Give evidence to support your view.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Answers will vary. Possibilities include that he is a risk taker or an establishment man.

**EVIDENCE** risk taker—he rides in traffic without a helmet; establishment man—he is dressed in business attire and riding a police motorcycle

**QUESTION** Who was the target audience for this photo and caption?

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Florida readers of the *St. Petersburg Times*, supporters of the police

**EVIDENCE** appeared in the *St. Petersburg Times*, Kerry riding a police motorcycle

**QUESTION** Why might Kerry have ridden a police motorcycle in West Palm Beach in June, 2004?

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** The Kerry campaign knew that photos like this would appear in newspapers or on TV. It was likely to have been a photo op to promote Kerry’s image and possibly his relations with police departments.

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

Kerry frequently used TV talk shows as a means to get in front of the public. In September 2003, prior to the primary season, he appeared on *The Tonight Show* playing a guitar on the street to raise money for his campaign. In August 2004 he chose Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* as the site of his first major TV interview following the Swift Boat attack ad. American Prospect’s website offered the following: “Kerry’s efforts to appear more regular—by riding a motorcycle onto the set of *The Tonight Show* and playing guitar with Moby—have been incredibly awkward and have only called attention to the perception that he is aloof” (<http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=1396>).

**2004 DOC. #5b**



**AP photo Kerry rides a Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Motorcycle before boarding a plane in West Palm Beach on Tuesday.**

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- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5c.
- > **Explain** that this photo was taken the same day as the previous photo. It appeared on the *Michigan Socialist* website with this caption in September 2004.

**QUESTION** How does the caption “spin” the meaning of the photo? Give evidence to support your conclusion.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** The caption is critical of Kerry, suggesting that he is unsuccessfully trying to appear like a rebel but instead looks like a fool.

**EVIDENCE** “Rebel without a clue” suggests that Kerry doesn’t even recognize that his attempt to look cool and rebellious is a failure because his clothing, personal style and intellectual demeanor are in such contrast to the image he’s trying to convey; “Michael Dukakis looked better in the tank” refers to the failed photo op of the 1988 Democratic Party candidate who appeared foolish while driving a tank in a suit and tie (see 1988 doc. #4a)

**QUESTION** Who might be the target audience for this photo and caption construction? Give evidence as to why.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Those who are wary of Kerry as a true progressive.

**EVIDENCE** the website of *Michigan Socialists* suggests a critique of Kerry from the left; the caption encourages questioning of Kerry’s “rebel” credentials

**2004 DOC. #5c**



**Rebel without a clue: John Kerry rides around on a police motorcycle. Honestly, Michael Dukakis looked better in the tank.**

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**ADDITIONAL INFO**

This photo of Kerry on a police motorcycle appeared in an article by editor Martin Schreder of the *Michigan Socialist* entitled “First as tragedy . . . second as farce: The political significance of the Kerry-Edwards ticket.” In the article Schreder writes: “The Kerry-Edwards ticket is offering the capitalists an opportunity to diffuse the protests, silence the protestors and get back to business.... The race between the Republican and Democratic candidates is a race to see who will be the executive committee of the ruling capitalist class—who will be the overseers in capitalism’s wage-slave system” (<http://www.news.mi-socialists.org/tms009-kerryedwards.html>).

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5d.
- > **Explain** that this image and caption is from a CNN website Photo Gallery of the Candidates.

QUESTION **What messages about Kerry do the image and caption convey? Give evidence to support your view.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Kerry is an athlete and a leader.

EVIDENCE athlete—he is shown in an athletic pose, windsurfing with his biceps flexed; leader—he is shown ahead of another windsurfer; his eyes are focused on the task ahead

QUESTION **Would you say this is a positive or a negative portrayal of Kerry?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER This is a particularly subjective question but students will likely see this as a positive image and caption. Probe for their reasoning.

QUESTION **Where did CNN get this photo?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER From the Kerry Campaign.

QUESTION **Why would the Kerry campaign provide CNN with this photo?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The Kerry campaign wants to get positive pictures of their candidate into the press.

QUESTION **Why would CNN print that it was provided “Courtesy of the Kerry Campaign”?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER CNN wanted to alert viewers to the fact that this photo was provided by the Kerry Campaign as publicity, rather than being taken by a press photographer.

**2004 DOC. #5d**



**An athlete in high school and college, Kerry continues to enjoy sports, including snowboarding and windsurfing, and has often been photographed throwing a baseball while on the campaign trail**

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- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5e.
- > **Explain** that this image is a freeze frame from a TV commercial that first aired in September 2004.

QUESTION **What message about Kerry does this image and super-imposed text try to “spin”? Give evidence to support your view.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is a “flip-flopper,” changing his position repeatedly

EVIDENCE the text “Iraq War—supported and opposed” suggests that Kerry has changed his position on the war; the photo itself is fuzzy suggesting unclear thinking; his position on the board could change any minute depending on the direction of the wind

QUESTION **Who do you suspect produced this commercial? Give evidence to support your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The Bush campaign or another anti-Kerry political group.

EVIDENCE the Bush campaign regularly attacked Kerry for “flip-flopping” in his position on the war in Iraq

**SEE NOTE** →

**2004 DOC. #5e**



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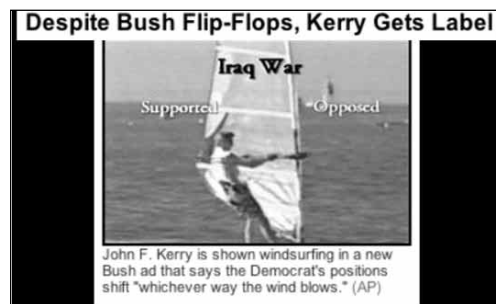
**NOTE**

Senator Kerry voted to give President Bush the authorization to wage war in Iraq in October 2002, one year after the 9/11 attacks. Kerry later criticized President Bush both for his decision to go to war based on faulty intelligence and for the administration’s poor handling of the war. The Bush campaign successfully attacked Kerry’s position on Iraq as indecisive and “flip-flopping,” a charge that resonated with many voters. The commercial pictured here edits footage of Kerry windsurfing to make it seem that he is sailing left then right then left again as the narrator mocks Kerry’s indecision.

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5f.
- > **Explain** that this image appeared in a *The Washington Post* article shortly after the Kerry windsurfing commercial was aired. The article, titled “Despite Bush Flip-Flops, Kerry Gets Label,” included the caption printed here.

QUESTION	<b>How does <i>The Washington Post</i> “spin” the Kerry image? Give evidence to support your conclusion.</b>
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The title suggests that Bush is actually the flip-flopper and the caption suggests that the characterization of Kerry as a flip-flopper is one created by the Bush campaign.
EVIDENCE	the title “Despite Bush Flip-Flops, Kerry Gets Label” clearly pins the flip-flop charge on Bush; the caption explains that the image and the flip-flop suggestion comes from “a new Bush ad”

**2004 DOC. #5f**



**“Despite Bush Flip-Flops, Kerry Gets Label”**

**John F. Kerry is shown windsurfing in a new Bush commercial that says the Democrat’s positions shift “whichever way the wind blows” (AP).**

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**ADDITIONAL INFO**

*The Washington Post* article by John F. Harris entitled “Despite Bush Flip-Flops, Kerry Gets Label” (accompanied by the photo from the anti-Kerry “Windsurfing” ad) began as follows: “One of this year’s candidates for president, to hear his opposition tell it, has a long history of policy reversals and rhetorical about-faces—a zigzag trail that proves his willingness to massage positions and even switch sides when politically convenient. The flip-flopper, Democrats say, is President Bush.” The article goes on to point out Bush’s changes of position on air pollution regulation, on state sanction of same-sex marriage, on creating the Homeland Security Department and on the issue of testimony before the 9/11 commission (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43093-2004Sep22.html>).

> **Project** the document 2004 Doc. #5g.

> **Explain** that this image appeared on the Major League Baseball website in February 2004.

QUESTION **What message about Bush does this image convey? Give evidence to support your view.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Answers will vary but may include that Bush enjoys sports like other “regular” American guys.

EVIDENCE likes sports—attending NASCAR racing; regular guy—he is in the pit in a jump suit, shaking hands with a driver; American—he appears at the Daytona 500, an American tradition in a sport (NASCAR racing) specific to the U.S. and associated with working class men; he shakes hands with a driver wearing decals for U.S. companies Ford and Champion

QUESTION **Who might be the target audience for this photo and caption? Give evidence as to why.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Men, baseball and auto racing fans.

EVIDENCE the photo appears on the Major League Baseball site; the sports of baseball and NASCAR are more likely to appeal to men than women; the photo shows only men

**2004 DOC. #5g**



President Bush (left) greets drivers in the pit at the Daytona 500 on Sunday. (Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP)

**President Bush (left) greets drivers in the pit at the Daytona 500 on Sunday (Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP).**

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**ADDITIONAL INFO**

In the 2000 election “NASCAR dads” (along with “soccer moms”) were said to be one of those small populations of swing voters who could make or break the election. According to the online article “Shifting Gears: When it comes to presidential elections, there may be more to the NASCAR set than meets the eye,” by Matt Thompson, this may not have been the case. “A recent ABC News analysis of the exit polls from the 2000 election concluded that the ‘NASCAR dads’ aren’t swing voters at all, but rather a small and solid part of Bush’s core constituency. It may not be worth it for Democrats to pursue these fans, some experts say” (<http://www.prospect.org/webfeatures/2004/02/thompson-m-02-17.html>).

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. # 5h.
- > **Explain** that this image appeared on the anti-Bush website topplebush.com. Explain that the original photo has been manipulated with words added.

QUESTION **What messages about Bush are “spun” in this image? Give evidence to support your view.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The speech bubble suggests that Bush is fishing for votes at the race. The digitally added phrase “AWOL From” was added above the National Guard marking on the car. This is a reference to unproven accusations about George W. Bush’s military service in the 1960s.

QUESTION **Who might be the target audience for this manipulated photo construction? Give evidence as to why.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER People who dislike Bush.

EVIDENCE “ToppleBush.com” by its mere title suggests anti-Bush activism; the attacks on Bush in the manipulated photo underscore the desire to attack and unseat Bush

**SEE NOTE** →

**2004 DOC. #5h**



**President Bush looks over the National Guard-sponsored racecar under the guidance of driver Bill Elliott prior to the running of the Daytona 500, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2004, at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla. (AP Photo/Nigel Cook, Pool).**

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**NOTE**

During both the 2000 and 2004 campaigns George W. Bush was accused of using family connections to avoid going to Vietnam and of being AWOL (absent without leave) during his service in the Air National Guard.

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. # 5i.
- > **Explain** that this image appeared on the White House website: Week in Photo during the first week of May 2003. The photos documented President Bush’s landing on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1st to announce an end to major U.S. combat operations in Iraq.

**QUESTION** What message about Bush does this image convey? Give evidence to support your view.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Answers will vary. Possibilities include that he is a pilot himself, that he is supported by U.S. troops and that he is “one of the crew.”

**EVIDENCE** pilot—he appears wearing a flight suit and is surrounded by a Navy flight crew; supported by troops—all of the crew are smiling and appear happy to be with Bush; “one of the crew”—he stands in the midst of the group with one of the crew’s hand on his shoulder

**QUESTION** Does the caption shift the meaning behind the photo itself? Give evidence to support your conclusion.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** No, the caption only gives the reader the who, where and when.

**EVIDENCE** Who?—“President George W. Bush”  
Where?—“with flight deck crew of the USS Abraham Lincoln”  
When?—“May 1, 2003”

**QUESTION** Who might be the target audience for this photo? Give evidence as to why.

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** Supporters of the President and the military, young people, and media editors.

**EVIDENCE** supporters of the President—the photo first appeared on the White House’s own website where those supportive of the President would most likely be the main visitors; the crew members are all young military people; media editors might use the website to download photos and information for their publications

**2004 DOC. #5i**



White House photo by Paul Morse  
President George W. Bush poses with flight deck crew of the USS Abraham Lincoln May 1, 2003.

**President George W. Bush poses with flight deck crew of the USS Abraham Lincoln May 1, 2003.**

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**NOTE**

On May 1, 2003, President Bush flew onto the deck of an aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln where he announced the following: “Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed. (Applause.) And now our coalition is engaged in securing and reconstructing that country” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>).

- > **Project** the document 2004 Doc. # 5j.
- > **Explain** that this image and text appeared as a cover for *Time* magazine on Oct 6, 2003, during a time of continued fierce fighting between U.S. troops and the Iraqi insurgency.

QUESTION **What message about Bush does this image convey without the text? Give evidence to support your view.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Answers will vary. Possibilities include that Bush is pleased to announce the end of the war or that troops are uncertain about his presence.

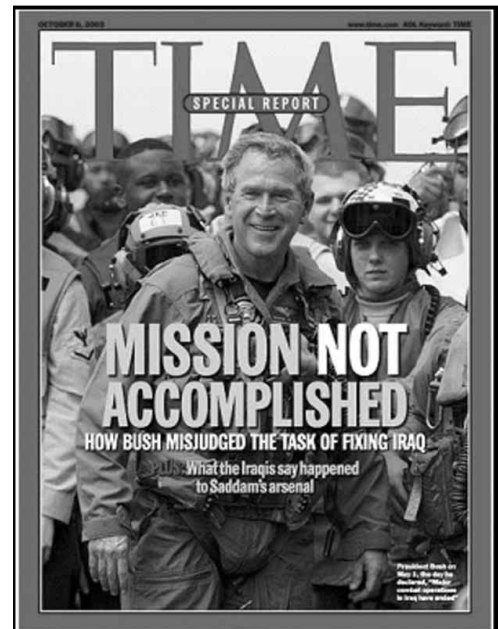
EVIDENCE pleased—Bush is smiling as he stands among the flight crew  
uncertain—the female pilot is not smiling, perhaps uncertain of Bush’s motives

QUESTION **How does the title and text spin the meaning of the photo? Give evidence to support your conclusion.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The words suggest that Bush has not accomplished what he previously promised.

EVIDENCE the headline: “MISSION NOT ACCOMPLISHED” and “HOW BUSH MISJUDGED” suggests that Bush has not done what he said; the smaller text at bottom right reminds readers of the ongoing war and Bush’s previous statement: “Major combat operations in Iraq have ended”

**2004 DOC. #5j**



**“MISSION NOT ACCOMPLISHED**

**HOW BUSH MISJUDGED THE TASK OF FIXING IRAQ PLUS: What the Iraqis say happened to Saddam’s arsenal**

**President Bush on May 1, the day he declared “Major combat operations in Iraq have ended”**

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QUESTION **Why might *Time* use this photo from May on their October cover?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER By re-running a familiar photo that was originally used to celebrate success in the war, *Time* is making a provocative editorial statement about the inaccuracy of Bush's earlier claims. The ironic drama of this cover is likely to provoke readers to pick up the magazine, one of the primary goals of a magazine cover.

EVIDENCE *Time* inverted the triumphant May 1st slogan, "Mission Accomplished" and the accompanying image of success, to critique the lack of success in the war; magazine covers are advertisements seeking to invite potential customers to buy the magazine; since controversy is an effective sales technique, editors are hoping that casual viewers will want to read an exposé inside and thus buy this "special issue"

SEE NOTE →

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

Do you think that it is OK for a partisan website to manipulate an image by adding text?

How about if a newspaper or a magazine does the same thing? Why or why not? Does it make a difference if the manipulation occurs on a magazine cover versus in an article or photograph on the inside?

Both Bush and Kerry are very wealthy men. Why might they want to portray themselves as "regular guys" riding Harleys and attending NASCAR races?

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

**Media Bias, Reaching Voters (photo-op), Target Audience, Attack, "Hero," "Commoner"**

**NOTE**

The *Time* magazine cover story began: "On May 1, off the coast of California, President George W. Bush landed in flying gear on the deck of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln—which sported a banner reading MISSION ACCOMPLISHED—and said, 'Major combat operations in Iraq have ended.' The war, said Bush, had been carried out 'with a combination of precision and speed and boldness the enemy did not expect, and the world had not seen before.' But the mission wasn't accomplished then, and it still is not. The reconstruction of Iraq has proved far more difficult than any official assumed it would be" (*Time* Oct. 6, 2003)

On May 1, 2003 when the President announced that "major combat operations" in Iraq had ended, 140 U.S. troops had died in the war (<http://icasualties.org/oif/>). When *Time* ran this cover story in October of 2003, the number had reached 330. In October of 2005 U.S. losses surpassed 2000 (<http://www.forbes.com/home/feeds/ap/2006/01/16/ap2452858.html>).