

TEACHER GUIDE

2000 DOC. #14: News Photo of Handmade Signs

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Media are not only made by major corporations with billions of dollars and high technology and seen by the masses. Media are also what individuals make with their own hands and minds that may be seen by only a handful of people. Homemade buttons are media. Personal web sites are media. Topical songs written by your neighbor are media.

Sometimes grassroots media gets seen by a large number of people. This was especially true in the “hurrah campaigns” of the 19th century when a handmade sign in a street parade might be seen by thousands. The same was true of popular songs of the day. The song “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” was written by a jeweler from Zanesville, Ohio named Alexander Ross. The magazine *North American Review* called it “the political canvas of 1840” and claimed “it sang Harrison into the presidency.”

In the 21st century it’s harder for an individual’s creative effort to receive wide distribution if it is not first commissioned by a marketing team. Nevertheless, occasionally the expression of an anonymous individual does make it onto the national screen. This happened during the 36-day period between Election Day, November 7, 2000 and December 12 when the Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision to end the Florida vote recount resulted in Bush winning the presidency.

That period of uncertainty included the issues of “hanging chads” and overseas military ballots. Chads were tiny strips of paper attached to a punch-card ballot that, depending on interpretation, could indicate a clear vote or a failed attempt. The military ballot dispute centered on how to count servicemen’s ballots in cases where the postmarks were lacking. Both parties created Recount Committees, each raising over 3 million dollars to fund their candidate’s assertion that they were the true winner.

During the five weeks between the election and Gore’s concession, the cover of the *New York Times* several times displayed news photos of concerned voters’ placards. The last document in this kit shows examples of these homemade media. It is a reminder of where all democratic process begins - in the determination and creative spark within individuals and communities everywhere.

> Project the document.

QUESTION What are the messages that are present in the demonstrators’ placards?

SUGGESTED ANSWER Gore won the election, the election process is fraudulent, and Gore is trying to steal military ballots.

EVIDENCE “Gore got more votes,” “fraud” and “Al – Thou shall not steal. God bless our service men and women.”

2000 DOC. # 14



Bush and Gore supporters crowded yesterday near the site of Palm Beach County's manual recount.

Gore Opens Drive to Keep Democrats in the Fight

By RICHARD L. BERKE
 WASHINGTON, Nov. 24 — Vice President Al Gore has begun an aggressive drive to rally prominent members of his party behind him, party risks alienating the public by pursuing a cause that some might perceive as lost, their basic message is, Don't give up. They argue, urgently, that more people in Florida intended to vote for Mr. Gore than for Gov. George W. Bush, and that the

New York Times Photo of Handmade Signs

PowerPoint Slide

QUESTION **Which campaign has more supporters in this photo?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Bush has more supporters in this photo.**

EVIDENCE three signs are clearly for Gore and seven signs are clearly for Bush

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Have you ever created an expression of your own political beliefs? Has anyone else seen it?

How does television and “big media” conglomeration affect the ability of dissenting voices to get a wider hearing?

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Reaching Voters (handmade sign)
 Consider the handmade banner from 1800 (doc. # 6), which is perhaps the oldest example we have of U.S. citizens’ post-election artwork. Compare it with the placards in this document from 200 years later. Discuss what it takes for someone to take to the streets with their personal expression of political will. Why would someone do this? Can it make any difference?