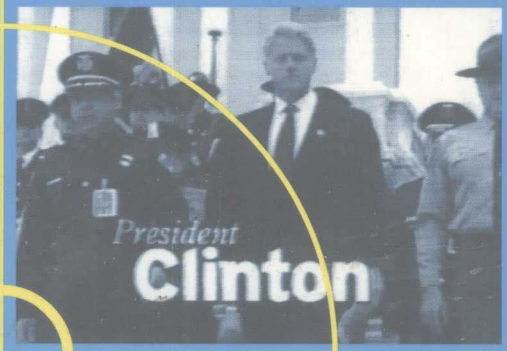
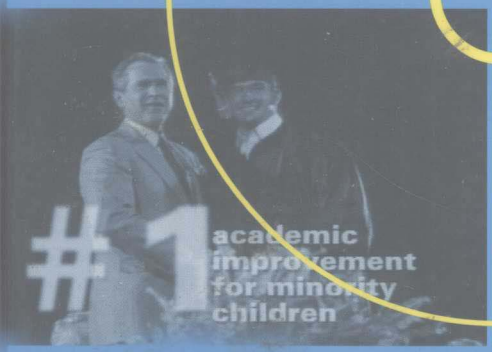
DARRELL M. WEST

AIR WARS





THIRD EDITION

Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952–2000

Air Wars

TELEVISION ADVERTISING IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, 1952–2000

THIRD EDITION

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Preface

Since the publication of the second edition of this book, several new developments have occurred in the advertising world: the fragmentation of the media marketplace, Internet ads by candidates, issue ads by outside groups, new technology that allows candidates to manipulate ad images electronically, controversies over the use of ad watches by the media, and computerized ad-buy strategies to target candidate messages. It therefore is timely to publish a new edition that addresses each of these developments with data from the 2000 campaign. New material on ads in congressional elections has been included, and all of the chapters have been thoroughly revised and updated.

Throughout the book, I have undertaken original data collection on the 2000 campaign. This includes fresh material on ad buys, a review of issue-advocacy advertising, content analyses of campaign ads and media coverage of ads, and a national public opinion survey undertaken during the last week of the 2000 campaign. This information allows me to discuss changes in the use and effects of campaign advertising.

Chapter 1 discusses how ads are put together. It emphasizes the attention media consultants pay to music, color, editing techniques, audio voice-overs, code words, visual text, and visual images when developing campaign commercials. Chapter 2 shows how candidates buy airtime. These decisions, called ad buys, are the most fundamental decisions made in any campaign, and examination of them shows how commercials are used to advance the strategic goals of candidates. Chapter 3 reviews the messages presented in ads broadcast over the air as well as through the Internet. Chapter 4 looks at the relationship between ads and the news, focusing in particular on how reporters cover and evaluate political ads.

Chapters 5–8 investigate the impact of ads on viewers, looking at what citizens learn about the candidates through ads, how ads affect the agenda, how candidates attempt, through advertising, to shift the standards voters use to assess contestants, and how candidates play the blame game to shift responsibility for negative campaigning to their opponents. Chapter 9 studies ads in congressional races, and Chapter 10 puts advertising within the framework of democratic elections.

Many people deserve thanks for their assistance with this project. Katherine Stewart supervised the Election 2000 national public opinion survey at Brown University; those results are reported in this book. Todd Auwarter, Melissa Driscoll, Kristine Hutchinson, and Jonathan White provided research assistance and comments on the third edition. Jay Goodman and Jim Campbell made a number of very helpful comments on the second edition, and Dean Alger, Craig Allen, Brett Clifton, Michael Delli Carpini, Robert Dewhirst, Richard Francis, Chris Goodwin, Matthew Kerbel, Diana Mutz, and Michell Wilson made valuable suggestions on the first edition. Susan Walsh of CBS News provided results from CBS News/*New York Times* surveys on the 2000 campaign. The staff members at CQ Press deserve a big thank you. I am grateful to Brenda Carter, director of college publishing, and associate editor Gwenda Larsen for their help in making this edition possible. Amy Marks did an excellent job of copy editing the manuscript. Their advice made this a better book.

The John Hazen White Sr. Public Opinion Laboratory and the A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions at Brown University facilitated this analysis by providing research support for data collection. None of these individuals or organizations bears any responsibility for the interpretations presented here.

Television Advertising in Election Campaigns: A History in Pictures

1964

Johnson's "Daisy" ad shocked viewers in 1964.

1984

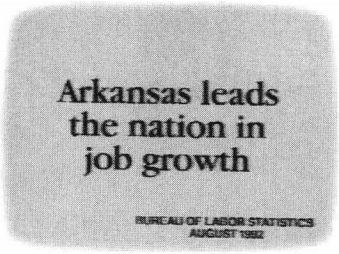
Reagan's "Bear in the Woods" ad was the most remembered spot in 1984.

1988

Bush's "Revolving Door" ad was one of the most notorious spots of 1988.

1990

Helms's 1990 spot, "White Hands," helped him win reelection.



1992

Clinton pioneered ads with footnotes to document his claims in 1992.

1992

In 1992, Perot attacked Clinton's job-creation record in Arkansas.

1992

Bush used a desolate landscape in 1992 to argue Clinton was too big of a risk.

1993

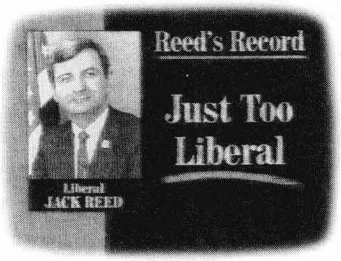
"Harry and Louise" helped undermine support for Clinton's health care reform in 1993.

1996

In 1996, Clinton surrounded himself with police officers to buttress his credentials as a leader who is tough on crime.

1996

Democrats turned Dole and Gingrich into Siamese twins in the 1996 campaign.

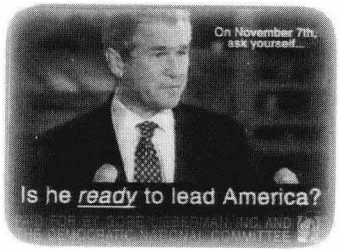


1996

The Republican National Committee attacked Democrats across the country in 1996 for "being too liberal."

1996

Dole's "American hero" ad documented his war wounds.



2000

Vice President Gore complained that George W. Bush was not ready to lead the nation.

2000

Governor Bush's commercials portrayed Gore as a partisan political figure.

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Chapter 1

Overview of Ads

Charges of hyperbole filled television screens across the United States in the fall of 2000. Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush was broadcasting an ad criticizing Vice President Al Gore for stretching the truth when he complained that his mother-in-law's prescription drugs cost more than those of his dog. The commercial suggested Gore was "bending the truth again." In his spots, Gore attacked Bush's inexperience, his Social Security proposal, and his Texas record, and argued Bush was not ready to lead the country.[1]

In what turned out to be an historic cliffhanger, Gore won the popular vote by 49 percent, compared with Bush's 48 percent and Green Party nominee Ralph Nader's 3 percent. But following disputed tallies in Florida and weeks of counts and recounts that ultimately put that state in the Texan's corner, Bush won the electoral college 271 to 266, just two votes over the majority required. It was the first split outcome between the popular and electoral college votes since 1888.

Meanwhile, groups from the National Rifle Association to the Sierra Club and the NAACP broadcast ads targeting voters in key congressional districts. In one NAACP spot, grainy images showed an unidentified object being dragged by a chain from a pickup truck while an announcer warned, "James Byrd Jr. was beaten, chained, and then dragged behind a pickup truck three miles to his death simply because he was black. Even after such a brutal act as this, hate crimes legislation in many states still remains nonexistent. . . . Vote on November 7."[2] Despite a proliferation of such advertisements, most congressional incumbents retained their seats and Republicans kept control of the House by a narrow margin.

In New York state, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was locked in a tight battle for the U.S. Senate with Rep. Rick Lazio. Seeking to make history by becoming the only first lady to win elective office in her own right, Clinton broadcast ads tying Lazio to unpopular former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. For his part, Lazio aired ads that blasted Clinton as a person not be to trusted and whose ineptitude at health care reform demonstrated her inability to lead.[3] Clinton ended up winning the election 55 percent to 44 percent.

As illustrated by these examples, television ads are a major component of political races. In recent presidential campaigns, campaign spots have comprised around 60 percent of total fall expenditures.[4] Commercials not only are the single biggest expenditure in major campaigns but also are used to shape citizens' impressions and affect news coverage. As such, they represent a major strategic tool for campaigners. However, not all spots produce the same result. Some ads work whereas others do not. In order to determine which spots are effective, analysts must look at production techniques, ad buys (the frequency and location of ad broadcasting), opposition responses, news coverage, and citizens' predispositions. Through detailed studies of ad campaigns since the 1950s, this book shows how to assess ad messages, media coverage of ads, and ad impact on voters.

The History of Ads

From the earliest days of the Republic, communications devices have been essential to political campaigns. In 1828, handbills distributed by Andrew Jackson's supporters portrayed John Quincy Adams as "driving off with a horsewhip a crippled old soldier who dared to speak to him, to ask an alms." A circular distributed by Adams's forces meanwhile attacked Jackson for "ordering other executions, massacring Indians, stabbing a Samuel Jackson in the back, murdering one soldier who disobeyed his commands, and hanging three Indians."[5]

The method, though perhaps not the tone, of communicating with the electorate has changed dramatically since 1828. Handbills have virtually disappeared. Radio became the most popular vehicle in the 1920s and 1930s. After World War II, television emerged as the advertising medium of choice for political candidates. And now, in the twenty-first century, the media marketplace has frag-

mented into a bewildering variety of communications channels from cable television and talk radio to late-night entertainment shows and the World Wide Web. A new Internet-based lexicon has appeared that distinguishes banner ads (large boxes that span the top of a Web site), interstitial ads (spots that flash while a Web site is being loaded), pop-up ads (spots that appear after a Web site is loaded), transactional ads (spots that allow viewers to make a purchase or request information), and rich media ads (spots that have audio, video, or motion embedded within them).[6] Somehow, in this multifaceted situation, candidates must figure out how to reach voters who will decide key election contests.

The 1952 presidential campaign was the first one to feature television ads. In that year, each party ran television and print ads evoking World War II memories. Republicans, in an effort to support General Dwight Eisenhower and break two decades of Democratic control, reminded voters in a *New York Times* ad that "one party rule made slaves out of the German people until Hitler was conquered by Ike." Not to be outdone, Democratic ads informed voters that "General Hindenburg, the professional soldier and national hero, [was] also ignorant of domestic and political affairs. . . . The net result was his appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor."[7]

In the 1960s, television spots highlighted differences in candidates' personal traits. The 1964 presidential campaign with Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater was one of the most negative races since the advent of television. Johnson's campaign characterized Goldwater as an extremist not to be trusted with America's future. One five-minute ad, "Confession of a Republican," proclaimed, "This man scares me. . . . So many men with strange ideas are working for Goldwater."[8] Johnson's "Daisy" ad made a similar point in a more graphic manner. Along with speeches and news coverage, the visual image of a mushroom cloud rising behind a little girl picking daisies in a meadow helped raise doubts about Goldwater's fitness for office in the nuclear age, even though a firestorm of protest forced the ad off the air after only one showing.

Ads in the 1970s and 1980s took advantage of public fear about the economy. When the United States started to experience the twin ills of inflation and unemployment, a phenomenon that led experts to coin a new word, *stagflation,* campaign commercials emphasized economic themes. In 1980, Republican challenger Ronald Reagan